THE MYSTICISM OF POYGAI ĀḶVĀR

R. BALASUBRAMANIAN

BY THE SAME AUTHOR

The Personalistic Existentialism of Berdyaev
The Taittirīyopaniṣad-bhāṣya-vārtika of Sureśvara
Advaita Vedānta

THE MYSTICISM OF POYGAI ĀḶVĀR

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VEDANTA PUBLICATIONS

70/2, MIG Flat, First Avenue

ASHOK NAGAR, MADRAS - 83.

First Published in 1976

© R. Balasubramanian

PRICE Rs. 5/-

PRINTED AT
AVVAI ACHUKKOODAM, 96, P. V. KOIL STREET, MADRAS-600013.

PREFACE

Poygai Āḻvār's *Mudal Tiruvantādi* consists of one hundred verses. Fiftyone verses selected from this *Tiruvantādi* have been translated into English in this volume; and their mystical and philosophical significance has been brought out, closely following the commentaries on this *Tiruvantādi* written from the standpoint of Śrīvaiṣṇavism. Relevant passages from *śruti* and *smṛti* have been cited in the context to highlight the points stressed by the Āḻvār in the hymns.

A mystic is a spiritual personality without frontiers. Though he may belong to a particular religion, culture, and period, his views have universal appeal transcending the dogmas of religion and the limitations of culture and period. So it is not only to Viśiṣṭādvaitins and Śrīvaiṣṇavites, but to others as well that the hymns of Poygai Āḻvār are of great value. It means that the hymns may also be interpreted from other points of view. Alternative interpretation, wherever possible, has also been given in the annotations on the verses.

I contributed some articles to the *Bhagya Bharani*, the monthly journal of Sri Panrimalai Samikal Cultural Centre Madras, relating to Poygai Āḻvār's *Mudal Tiruvantādi*. Sometime back I delivered a course of special lectures on Poygai Āḻvār under the auspices of Sri Ramakrishna Math, Mylapore, Madras. These articles and lectures served as the nucleus for this monograph. I express my gratefull thanks to these organizations. A special article which I contributed to the *Indian Philosophical Annual*, Volume VIII, of the Dr S. Radhakrishnan Institute for Advanced Study in Philosophy, University of Madras, helped me to give a definite shape to this monograph. In this connection, I express my thanks to the Editor of the *Indian Philosophical*

Annual for permission to make use of my special article in the preparation of this monograph.

I am grateful to Dr V. A. Devasenapathi, Director, The Dr S. Radhakrishnan Institute for Advanced Study in Philosophy, and Dr N. Veezhinathan, Reader in Sanskrit, University of Madras, for their helpful suggestions and guidance. I Express my grateful thanks to Professor K. Seshadri for writing a Foreword to this book.

R. BALASUBRAMANIAN

FOREWORD

The Āḻvārs are aptly described as *divers* in the ocean of God-experience. They are immersed in " Bhagavad-anubhava ". Their song-effusions are spontaneous out-pourings, that contain the pearls gathered from the depths. They are inspired poetry,—not deliberate or designed for effect. They are fresh, yet ripe in content and finished to a perfection in form,—" prabandhas " *par excellence*. They carry no trace of common self-consciousness, but reveal a profound awakening in a new dimension of their inner being and enduring, ego-less awareness of the Supreme as the Soul of souls and the Self of all. " It is not I that sing, but God in me," protests one of the Āḻvārs. " *Tāné yānenbāgi tannaittāné tudittu*, " are his very words.

The hymns of the Āḻvārs are no mere praises that propitiate. They illumine and elevate. They are authentic utterances, fresh from a direct " encounter with Truth ". The Āḻvārs are mystics, " filled with a mazing tidings, " which they can hardly tell and which they are altogether unable to contain. Their expression is sublime in their symbolism, and what they seek to convey has taken its rise in a transcendental order.

Mysticism implies a re-assessment of the world and of one's own being. The mystic sees the world in a new light, " charged with a new vitality, with a splendour which does not belong to it but is poured through it ". He sees the world as deified, because he is himself cleansed and purified.

" The completed mystical life " is " to know the hidden unity in eternal Being ". The superior mystic " enjoys all creatures in God,

and God in all creatures". The life of the Āḻvārs may well be called the completed mystical life. They truly typify every phase of superior mysticism. Mysticism being essentially a movement of the heart in its inmost depths, the Āḻvārs speak the language of the heart, and what they convey would surpass all philosophies as products of mere intellectual effort. There is no East or West in mystic experience. The dialects differ, but the message is the same.

The Āḻvārs are reckoned as twelve in number in the tradition of South Indian mysticism including Āṇḍāḷ and Madhurakavi. Nammāḻvār is looked upon as the central luminary in the galaxy, but Poygai Āḻvār, Bhūtattāḻvār and Peyāḻvār are together hailed as "Mudalāḻvārs", being chronologically prior to all the others. The present work confines itself to Poygai Āḻvār, and is distinctive as an exposition of his mysticism. It does not claim to be a rendering in English of all the hundred verses of Poygai's composition celebrated as the *Mudal Tiruvantādi*. Yet, in a sense, it accomplishes more than what a translation, however thorough and complete in itself, may seek to achieve. Indeed, we have here a simple and lucid rendering of almost all the verses, together with their text in the original given as part of the foot-notes, as we move from page to page. But its uniqueness lies in the sequence of thought, which it reveals, as the exposition advances. The topics dealt with are presented serially under appropriate heads, beginning with "The World and its Cause" and concluding with "Assurance and Attainment". The magnificense of the *Antādi's* opening verse is in the mystic splendour of a cosmic symbolism, to which the inward eye of the Āḻvār opens, deepening and infinitely enlarging the outer vision of common perception and empirical understanding. The concluding verse brings the whole course of the mystic movement to a spiritual consummation in self-surrender. Dr Balasubramanian's treatment serves to reflect the special excellences of the *Mudal Tiruvantādi* in the context of universal mysticism. He has brought to bear on it the fruits of a careful study of the text as well as some of the leading traditional commentaries. His brief Introduction is a systematic presentation of the meaning of mysticism and

offers a basis for a comprehensive interpretation of the mysticism of the Āḻvārs, both in the light of theistic mysticism and of identity mysticism. Mysticism represents the ineffable sublimities of spiritual experience, which would defy all analysis and categorisation. "Oh, taste and see."

K. SESHADRI

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INTRODUCTION

Tradition has it that Poygai Āḻvār, Bhūtattāḻvār, and Peyāḻvār were chronologically the earliest among the Āḻvārs. These three Āḻvārs are spoken of as "*mudalāḻvārgaḷ*" in the Vaiṣṇava tradition of the South. Of these three, Poygai was the first. The advent of these three Āḻvārs is supernatural, for each one of them is said to have come out of a flower. It is believed that the advent of Poygai Āḻvār into this world was from a lotus in the tank (*poygai*) near the Yathoktakāri temple at Kāñcī in the month of *tulā* when the star *śravaṇa* was in the ascendant. Mahābalipuram and Mylapore are the places associated with the advent of Bhūtattāḻvār and Peyāḻvār respectively. The first three Āḻvārs were contemporaries. According to the tradition, their advent took place in the same month and in the same year on consecutive days.

Not only was Poygai the earliest among the Āḻvārs, but his work, *Mudal Tiruvantādi*, was also the first among the compositions of the Āḻvārs, known collectively as *Divyaprabandha*. Poygai's *Mudal Tiruvantādi* consists of one hundred verses. The expression "*antādi*" is a compound consisting of two words "*anti*" (end) and "*ādi*" (beginning). *Antādi* is a kind of poetry in Tamil in which the last word or syllable of the preceding stanza is the opening word or syllable of the succeeding stanza. In the Vaiṣṇava tradition, Poygai Āḻvār is referred to as *ādikavi*, the first among the God-intoxicated mystic-poets, and as *kavikulaṛṣabha*, the preeminent among the galaxy of poets. He has given us the invaluable treasure of a hundred-verse-*antādi* in Tamil, profound in thought, beautiful in diction, and rich in imagery with a view to help us overcome the sorrow of bondage. Poygai Āḻvār's *Mudal Tiruvantādi* has been commented upon by the celebrated teachers of Śrīvaiṣṇavism like Periyavāccān Piḷḷai and Appiḷḷai. It is

believed that Poygai is an *aṁśa* of *Pāñcajanya*, the sacred conch of Viṣṇu. And Poygai's association with Kāñcī and the star *śravaṇa* adds to his greatness.[1]

Not knowing each other, the first three Āḻvārs were moving from place to place, visiting temples and worshipping the sacred images (*arcās*) installed therein. Their mission in life was to glorify God and enjoy Him forever. The divine plan was such that it brought them together face to face in one place and gave them an occasion to intuit God's presence in their midst. One day when it was heavily raining after sun-set, Poygai Āḻvār took shelter in the passage of the hermitage of the sage Mṛgaṇḍu at Tirukkovalūr. The passage was narrow and completely enveloped in darkness. The area of the passage was such that only one person could lie down there, two could sit, and three could stand. It so happened that two other devotees, Bhūtattāḻvār and Peyāḻvār, also came there one after another for shelter. Wherever there are devotees, in all those places the Lord marks his presence. "Whoso worship me with devotion," says Lord Kṛṣṇa, "they are in me, and I am also in them."[2] There is also the testimony of Jesus: ".....where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them."[3] When the three Āḻvārs were together in the narrow, dark, congested passage, their thoughts were as usual about God, and all of them suddenly felt the presence of a fourth person who was elbowing them. Very soon they realized that the fourth person was no other than the Lord of Śrī. Poygai Āḻvār records the experience he had at that time in one of the verses in his *Tiruvantādi*. He says: "O the virtuous Lord who protected the people from the torrential rain of stones by holding aloft the mountain as an umbrella! Without going outside the threshold and also without getting into the interior of the house, you just now stationed yourself along with Śrī in the corridor of the house situated in the beautiful Tirukkovalūr liked by all. It is, indeed, marvellous."[4] Just as the devotees seek God, even

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1. "*tulāyām śrāvaṇe jātam kāñcyām kāñcanavārijāt*
Dvāpare pāñcajanyāṁśam saroyoginamāśraye."
2. *Bhagavad-gītā*, IX, 29.
3. *Matthew*, XVIII, 20.
4. verse 86.

so the latter seeks the company of the devotees. Like Poygai, Bhūtattāḻvār too had the vision of the eternal at that time. He identifies the supreme Person whom he saw then as *Nārāyaṇa* in the first verse of his *Tiruvantādi*. Bringing out the association of *Śrī* with *Nārāyaṇa*, Peyāḻvār, instead of just declaring "I saw God", gives details of what he witnessed at that time. In a hymn of matchless beauty, unsurpassed vividness, and inspiring declaration he says: "Today in the Lord who is of the colour of the sea, I saw *Śrī*. I saw the body shining like gold. I saw the luminous light like that of the sun. I saw the lustrous discus which displays its supremacy in the battlefield. I saw the conch.[5]

It is difficult to define mysticism. The word "mysticism" has been used in different senses some of which are derogatory. It is used to convey what is mysterious and awe-inspiring. It is also used to convey the esoteric. It is sometimes used in the sense of what is unintelligible, foggy, and vague. It is also used to refer to a certain kind of experience different from the ordinary empirical experience. Because of the close association of religion with mysticism, it becomes rather difficult to distinguish the latter from the former. Visions and voices, trances and emotional states are also associated with mysticism. In view of the several senses in which the word "mysticism" has been used, it is difficult to give a satisfactory definition of mysticism. It does not follow from this that we cannot indicate the generally accepted sense in which the word has been used by all those who are favourably disposed towards mysticism. Generally, it has been used to convey the intuitive realization of the oneness of Reality, which is altogether different from intellectual apprehension, as also the direct communion of the individual soul with the supreme Being.

There are different kinds of mysticism such as theistic and transtheistic (which is otherwise called identity mysticism), extrovertive and introvertive, nature mysticism, aesthetic mysticism, soul mysticism, and so on. We also speak of Christian mysticism, Sūfi mysticism, Hindu mysticism, Buddhist mysticism, etc. Some varieties of mysticism are said to be sacred, while some others are characterized as profane. Different kinds of mysticism have existed in all ages and cultures.

5. First verse in the *Third Tiruvantādi*.

Though there are undoubtedly some points of difference between one kind of mysticism and another, there are many characteristics common to the different kinds of mysticism. The common characteristics which constitute the universal core of mysticism are: (1) experience of oneness, (2) the apprehension of the one as the inner Spirit in all things, (3) objectivity of experience, (4) an experience of joy, happiness, blessedness, etc., (5) a feeling that what is apprehended is holy, sacred, or divine, and (6) the loss of individuality.[6]

When we say that some one is a mystic, we mean that the person concerned is one who has mystical experience. A mystic, whether Eastern or Western, Christian or Hindu, extrovertive or introvertive, is one who has *direct apprehension* of the transcendent reality, resulting in *unitive experience*, in whatever way the expression "unitive experience" is interpreted. He has the actual experience of what he is talking about. His experience of the One is direct and immediate, and not indirect and mediate.

A mystic that he is, Poygai Āḻvār experiences the one supreme Being everywhere. When he sees *kāyā* and *pūvai* flowers which are black in colour, he sees the supreme Being.[7] These flowers as well as other things which are black reveal to him the presence of the one reality everywhere. On the basis of his own authentic experience he says that the supreme Being is everywhere—on the milky ocean, on the *Veṅkaṭa* hill, and in the minds of all people.[8] Like other mystics, Poygai Āḻvār affirms that the one reality is seen in different forms. The different forms of God, such as Śiva and Viṣṇu, worshipped and adored by the devotees are the manifestations of one and the same reality. Though apparently different in form, function, and other features, for both Śiva and Viṣṇu, Poygai Āḻvār declares, the body is

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6. See W.T. Stace, *Mysticism and Philosophy* (London: Macmillan & Co. Ltd., 1961), p. 131, for the list of common characteristics of extrovertive mystical experiences and of introvertive mystical experiences.

7. verse 89.

8. verse 99.

one.[9] This idea is again emphasized by him in another place as follows: "Though Śiva with a body shining like gold, with matted hair, and auspicious qualities, and Viṣṇu who measured the universe appear in two different forms, one is ever in the body of the other."[10] In respect of the manifested forms, Śiva and Viṣṇu are undoubtedly different; but they are *essentially* one, because the underlying reality in them of which they are the manifestations is one. We may drive home the point by means of an example. Though a pot and a pan are different from each other, they are nevertheless one, because the underlying reality in them, *viz* clay, of which they are the manifestations is the same. By stretching the line of reasoning stated above to other cases, we may say that all objects are one inasmuch as the underlying reality in all of them is one. While a mystic realizes the truth of the oneness of things through intuition, others who are at the level of reasoning fail to realize this truth.

Normally, we would say that it is not possible for objects to be different and also to be one at the same time. If objects are different, they cannot be one; and if they are one, they cannot at the same time be different. If so, how is it, it may be asked, that objects which are different are one according to the mystic? The problem is solved in terms of the perspective or standpoint that is involved. Objects may be viewed from two perspectives or standpoints. They may be viewed from the standpoint of intuition or from that of reasoning. An object is what it is; and there cannot be change in the essential nature of a thing. But there can be change in our perspective. Objects appear to be different when we view them from the standpoint of discursive reasoning. But they are seen as one when they are viewed from the standpoint of intuition. Since our reasoning is conditioned by *māyā-avidyā*, it presents what is one as manifold. The *Upaniṣad* says that the one reality, due to *māyā*, is perceived as manifold.[11] The oneness of things can be realized only at the mystical level of intuition, and not at the discursive level of reasoning. Let us see how Poygai Āḻvār in a subtle way brings out the distinction between the standpoint

9. verse 5.
10. verse 98.
11. *Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad*. II, v, 19.

of reasoning and that of intuition which transcends the level of reasoning. He asks: "Chattering the names of the Lord apart, who can truly know our supreme Being?"[12] He also says that the supreme Being can be known through true knowledge (மெய்ஞ் ஞானம்).[13] It may appear that Poygai Āḻvār is contradicting himself here, because he says that the supreme Being can be known and also cannot be known. But the contradiction is only apparent. The two statements made by him have reference to two different standpoints. The supreme Being, the Truth of all things, cannot be known through our senses and reasoning. But it can be known through true knowledge or intuition, what Poygai Āḻvār calls மெய்ஞ்ஞானம், which transcends the level of reasoning and senses, whose testimony holds good at the empirical level of distinctions.

Mystics claim that the highest reality is the inner Spirit of all things. The One, the mystics say, is not only the source and support, but also the inner controller of everything. The *Upaniṣad*, for example, speaks of Brahman as the indwelling Spirit (*antaryāmin*) in all beings, sentient and insentient.[14] In several places Poygai Āḻvār stresses the idea that the supreme Being is the cause of the world.[15] Since the supreme Being is one and non-dual, it is both the material and efficient cause rolled into one (*abhinna-nimitta-upādāna-kāraṇa*). Where are we to find this Reality? Poygai Āḻvār says that being the indwelling Spirit it is in the minds of those who think of it,[16] and that it is the controller of all elements, from *ākāśa* to earth, and also of the *jīvas*.[17]

Though mystic experience is subjective, it points to a reality which is objective, which is outside and beyond the mystic himself. In other words, the reality experienced by the mystic is transsubjective. Like other mystics, Poygai Āḻvār too speaks of the reality experienced

12. verse 56.
13. verse 47.
14. See *Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad*, Chapter III, section vii.
15. verses 61, 73, 92.
16. verse 99.
17. verse 96.

by him. And he identifies this reality as God, as *Nārāyaṇa*, the Lord of *Śrī*.

Poygai Āḻvār speaks of his God-experience in more than one hymn in the *Tiruvantādi*. Mystics speak of God-experience attained by them either all on a sudden or as a result of the pursuit of a vigorous discipline. Ramakrishna Paramahamsa and Ramana Maharshi, to mention only two, are outstanding examples of mystics in contemporary times who speak of their God-experience. Again, some mystics speak of God-experience attained by them even in the pre-natal condition. Poygai Āḻvār belongs to this category of mystics. Like Vāmadeva,[18] Poygai Āḻvār recollects the experience of God he had while he was lying in the womb. He says: "Even then (before birth) when I was lying in the womb, did I worship with the hands united in the direction of the Lord who resides in Śrīraṅgam, and saw him..."[19] The experience which the Āḻvār speaks of is the direct experience of God, an experience not attained through any process of reasoning. He is more certain about the *presence* of God experienced by him than we are of the things of the external world in our normal waking consciousness. In another place he says: "I saw and worshipped the feet of the Lord who, being touched by the waves of the ocean is in *yoga-nidrā* on the bed of *Ādiśeṣa*..."[20] Also, he saw the Lord with *Śrī*, he says, in the corridor of the hermitage of the sage at Tirukkovalūr when he took shelter therein.[21] Every mystic, whatever be the tradition or time he belongs to, speaks thus on the basis of his or her authentic experience. There is a long, continuous succession of mystics in the Hindu tradition right from the time of the Vedic seer who declared, "I know the sun beyond the darkness. He who knows Him thus becomes immortal in this life. There is no other way to immortality."[22]

A mystic experiences the joy of fulfilment, a feeling of happiness and blessedness, as a result of the intuition of the One or union with

18. See *Aitareya Upaniṣad*, II, i, 5.
19. verse 6.
20. verse 16.
21. verse 86.
22. *Puruṣasūktam*.

the highest reality. Since the realization of the highest has been vouchsafed to him, Poygai Āḻvār considers himself extremely fortunate. Wealth, pleasure derived from sensuous objects, lordship over the entire universe, the state of *kaivalya*,[23] etc., are values inferior to God-realization, which is the highest value.[24] While other values are finite and fleeting, the realization of the supreme Being which is *mokṣa* is the highest value which is infinite and eternal. Calling attention to the joy of fulfilment enjoyed by him as a result of the experience of the One everywhere, Poygai Āḻvār wonders whether there is anyone comparable to him.[25] He is happy that his mind, speech, and body are completely engrossed in God. He does not want, or care for, anything else. This being the case, he does not worry about anything that may happen to him.[26] As a consequence of God-realization, the Āḻvār finds that his life is invested with a new significance and purpose. He regrets for the godless life that he led earlier: "I wept in anguish that many days were spent uselessly (before I saw him)."[27] Realizing the meaning and purpose of life, he declares that he will lead a life of total dedication to the Lord. He says: "My mouth will not praise anyone but the Lord. My hands will not worship anyone but Viṣṇu, who (as *Trivikrama*) measured the world in three strides. My eyes will not see anything except the form of the Lord, and my ears will not hear anything except the name of the Lord, who consumed the poison, smeared on the breast of the demoness, Pūtanai."[28] In another hymn he says: "My hands will not worship anyone but the Lord. My two ears will remain hearing the pleasant names of the Lord who is related to me. Everyday my tongue will be speaking about the feet of the Lord who wears the sounding anklets and who has the mighty *Ādiśeṣa* as His bed. I will not shamelessly pursue the objects of pleasure."[29] The constant love of God gives him "peace" that passeth all understanding.

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23. *Kaivalya*, as explained in Viśiṣṭādvaita, is different from *mokṣa*.
24. verse 71.
25. verse 89.
26. verse 88.
27. verse 16.
28. verse 11.
29. verse 63.

A mystic, particularly of the theistic type, knows that the One which he has realized is the divine being, the most sacred one endowed with all auspicious qualities. Poygai Āḻvar characterizes the supreme Being as *naḷḷān*,[30] one who is good, as *paṇpan*,[31] one who is endowed with auspicious qualities, *guṇam koḷḷum*,[32] one who views favourably even the wrongs done by the *jīva*. He further identifies the supreme Being as Viṣṇu, the Lord of *Śrī*, who is armed with the beautiful discus, who wears the fresh and fragrant garland of basil, and who incarnated as *Varāha*, *Vāmana*, *Trivikrama*, etc.

The dissolution of individuality is an important feature of mystic experience. Ordinarily, an individual thinks of himself as separate from other individuals and the physical universe, and also from God. Further, he thinks of himself as the agent, and claims ownership of things, including his own body. The sense of "I" and "mine" is uppermost in his mind. But there is no room for individuality in mystic experience. The loss of the sense of individuality may be accounted for in two ways. One explanation is from the standpoint of identity mysticism, and the other from the standpoint of theistic mysticism.

Ignorance of the true nature of the inward Self which is no other than Brahman and which is one and non-dual, and a false identification with the not-Self are responsible for the rise of the sense of individuality. Though the Self is immutable (*kūṭastha*) and free from activity (*niṣkriya*), due to ignorance it is thought of as an agent. The Self is one and non-dual, and there is no second to it with which it can be related. Owing to ignorance, a person thinks of the Self in a relational way and claims that external things and the mind-body complex are related to it. The sense of individuality which a person develops due to *avidyā* functions in the twofold form of "I" and "mine," the nominative and possessive aspects of the ego. According to identity

30. verse 15.

31. verses 33, 86.

32. verse 41.

mysticism, when a person realizes the true nature of his inward Self as one and non-dual, the notion of individuality disappears.

Everything—the *jīva* as well as the physical universe—belongs to God, the supreme Self; and everything exists for the sake of God, being inseparably related to Him, as his body (*śarīra*), as His mode (*prakāra*), as a part (*śeṣa*) of His being. Owing to ignorance, a person thinks that he exists independently of God and that he is the owner of things, while the truth is that he is dependent on God who is the owner of the entire universe. The first *mantra* of the *Īśāvāsya Upaniṣad* says: "All this, whatever moves in this moving world, is enveloped by God. So find your enjoyment in renunciation; do not covet what belongs to others." Not knowing the nature of the three entities (*tattva-traya*), *viz* God, the *jīva*, and the world, a person develops the sense of individuality, becomes egoistic, and claims ownership of things that do not belong to him. His sense of individuality disappears when he knows the truth through mystic experience. In more than one hymn, Poygai Āḻvār refers to the case of Mahābali who was full of egoism and who was punished by the Lord in the appropriate way. Mahābali serves as a warning to those who are egoistic. Poygai Āḻvār asks: Is it not for removing the sense of "I" and "mine" (of the individual souls) that you, by begging and lowering your hands, accepted (three measures of) ground from Mahābali who claimed the world as his own even though it did not belong to him?[33] Without knowing the real position the ignorant, says the Āḻvār, think that the Lord played a trick on Mahābali and cheated him. And so they blame the Lord; but they do not censure Mahābali who managed to conceal his wrongs under the cloak of charity.[34]

It is wrong to think that identity mysticism and theistic mysticism are opposed to each other. It is the One which is experienced by all the mystics. While some mystics interpret it impersonally as what is free from name, form, and qualities, others interpret it as something personal, ascribing name, form, and qualities to it. While the former

33. verses 36, 50.

34. verse 79.

category of mystics represents identity mysticism, the latter theistic mysticism.

Śaṅkara observes that the One which is the Absolute is viewed in two ways—as what is associated with the distinctions of name and form arising because of the adjunct and as that which is free from every adjunct.[35] The numerous gods and goddesses of the pantheon, according to Advaita, are the manifestations of one and the same reality. Consequently, it is wrong to speak of hierarchy among these gods and goddesses. This, however, does not rule out the concept of personal God (*iṣṭa-devatā*), which is a remarkable feature of Hinduism. Advaita holds the view that the One of the plenary experience is impersonal and undifferentiated. It nevertheless admits the need for the worship of God and provides an important place for it in the scheme of discipline leading to the plenary experience.

Though Poygai Āḻvār interprets his experience of the One theistically, he shows how we may view the relation between theistic mysticism and identity mysticism. In one of the hymns he says: "In whatever form the devotee conjures up God who has the discus in His hand, the same form He assumes. Further, whatever name the devotee gives Him, the same name He accepts. With whatever qualities the devotee thinks of Him, with the same qualities He remains."[36] In another hymn he says: "Every one, according to one's understanding, considering this God or that as the supreme being, praises and worships Him..."[37] Does he say anything about his own preference of the form of God? In the same hymn towards the close, Poygai Āḻvār answers this question by saying that "the divine form of *Trivikrama* who measured the world is supreme".[38] The following points emerge from the two hymns of the Āḻvār cited above. (1) There is manifestation of the One in many forms as endowed with different names and qualities. (2) The One does not have *fixed* form, name, and qualities.

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35. See Śaṅkara's commentary on the *Vedānta-sūtra*, I, i, 12, at the beginning of the *ānandamayādhikaraṇa*.
36. verse 44.
37. verse 14.
38. *Ibid.*

In other words, the One transcends the form-name-quality aspect with which it is viewed by a devotee. (3) Every devotee has his own personal God (*iṣṭa-devatā*). (4) A devotee from his point of view may consider his personal God as supreme. (5) But from the context of the One of which every form is a manifestation, all forms of God have equal significance. In the light of the foregoing points it is obvious that there is no conflict between identity mysticism and theistic mysticism. A mystic may give an account of his experience of the One without any reference to form, name, and other distinctions; or he may speak of it as a differentiated being qualified by name, form, and other features.

While some mystics just give an account of their God-experience, there are other mystics who speak not only about their God-experience, but about the way to that experience also. Poygai Āḻvār belongs to the second category of mystics. Though there is no evidence to show that Poygai Āḻvār after his advent into this world went through the different stages in the journey to the realization of the One, for he was lucky enough to attain God-experience even in the pre-natal state,[39] we may on the basis of his suggestions contained in the hymns formulate certain stages in the spiritual discipline leading to the goal. There are four stages in the spiritual journey of the soul to the One: (1) detachment from the things of the transient world, (2) attachment to God, (3) seeking the help of God as the way and the goal, and (4) attainment of the goal.

In several hymns, Poygai Āḻvār lays emphasis on the cultivation of the spirit of detachment from the things of the world by controlling the senses and the mind. He says that the senses which are drawn towards the world cannot be controlled easily,[40] and compares them to the rutting elephants. "By withdrawing the five elephants, *viz* the senses, from the water and by efficiently controlling them without allowing them to roam about, those who know Him through true knowledge (*bhakti*) which is very subtle will realize the feet of the Lord who once upon a time protected the *Gajendra*."[41]

39. verse 6.
40. verses 32, 50.
41. verse 47.

Detachment from the world must be followed by attachment to God. The body, the senses, and the mind of the spiritual aspirant, says Poygai Āḻvār, must be completely engrossed in God. The Āḻvār lays stress on this in several hymns.[42] He says that the senses and the body, the practice of *karma* and the cultivation of virtues, continuous and one-pointed devotion and knowledge, are necessary for attaining the goal.[43] He appeals to the spiritual aspirant to make use of the mind-body organism while it is fit enough to do the job and practise any mode of worship possible for him. He says: "Worship the Lord of *Śrī*, while there is enough strength to utter His name. Worship Him while there is the physical body which may fall off (at any time). It will do good if you worship Him by offering a garland of flowers with lovely petals, or by *yajña*, or by deeds (such as prostration), or by uttering *mantra*, or even by uttering His name."[44] He gives the solemn assurance that the spiritual aspirant will attain the goal if he resorts to the right path. Here is the Āḻvār's declaration: "Those who worship you (the Lord) in the proper way will attain the form as stated in the eternally true *Veda*..."[45] He proclaims for the benefit of others the Vaiṣṇavaite code of conduct. He says: "I will not covet the objects of others. With the ignoble I will not make friends. With others excepting the noble, I will not move. Excepting the Lord of *Śrī*, I will not worship anyone as God. (Because of all these) I will not feel elated. If so, how can further *karma* accrue to me?"[46] Though this code of conduct is formulated by him apparently for his own observance, it is really meant for the guidance of others. Anyone who practises the code of conduct given above is a *Vaiṣṇavite*.

There is the crucial question whether the spiritual aspirant is by himself competent to tread the right path without the help of God. And this question leads us to the third stage in the spiritual journey of the soul to God. The spiritual aspirant must realize, according to Poygai

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42. verses 11, 63, 66, 72.
43. verse 12.
44. verse 70.
45. verse 76.
46. verse 64.

Āḻvār, that God is both the way and the goal, the path and the destination. After stating the fruits that accrue to a devotee who pursues the right path, the Āḻvār says that God Himself shows the way: "If we think of you, obstacles will disappear, and the binding evil deeds will loosen their hold and die. Those who meditate on you are free from old age (symbolising bondage). Those who worship your feet, O the Lord of *Śrī*, will find the way (to you)."[47]

The last stage is the attainment of the goal, *viz* union with God or the realization of the oneness of the supreme Reality, which is the highest value (*puruṣārtha*). Other values such as *kaivalya,* lordship over the entire universe, wealth, and sensuous pleasure are finite and transient. As one who glorifies the love of God, Poygai Āḻvār considers that the love of God itself is the highest value that one should aspire for; and so he says that whatever may be one's achievements one should not give up love of God. He implores his mind in the following way: "O my mind, deep like ocean! Even though disease and old age have been completely overcome (and therefore *kaivalya* has been attained), and even though lordship over the entire universe lasting through the four *yugas* has been achieved, do not give up love for the Lord who has the discus ready for destroying the evil. I beseech you."[48] The ideal of life envisaged by Poygai Āḻvār here reminds us of the true end of life as stated by Spinoza. According to Spinoza, "Love towards a thing eternal and infinite feeds the mind wholly with joy, and is itself unmingled with any sadness, wherefore it is greatly to be desired and sought after with all our strength." On the pretext of imploring the mind, Poygai Āḻvār entreats the spiritual aspirants to practise love of God.

The benefit derived by society from mystics like Poygai Āḻvār is manifold. It is wrong to think that mystics are of no use to others on the ground that they withdraw themselves from society. The truth is that they are much more concerned about the well-being of the people than others who profess to do so. Unlike others, they look at

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47. verse 75.

48. verse 71.

the problem of the well-being of the people from the spiritual rather than from the material point of view. A mystic, first of all, seeks to show to others the path to liberation which he has found. He provides guidance and direction for the spiritual development of the individual. He teaches to others what he considers to be the good life.

Mystics help humanity in yet another way. An individual cannot progress unless he keeps before himself an ideal. A mystic helps others in society by projecting the highest value or the greatest ideal which they have to attain. It is true that the "end" of life projected by a mystic is transcendent in the sense that it belongs to another "realm." It does not follow from this that the highest value or the end of life is beyond the reach of the ordinary man. It is expected of everyone to chalk out a programme of action for the attainment of the goal.

Thirdly, a mystic helps us to understand the meaning and purpose of life and the significance of the world in which we find ourselves. He helps us to understand how human beings and the things of the world are related to God. We can overcome our egoism which is the source of separateness, conflict, and suffering only by realizing the oneness of things or by realizing how we are related to God.

It is wrong to think that moral and social activities are the only ways through which one has to show his concern for others. By his thought and word, by his benign look and gentle touch, and also by his "eloquent" silence, a mystic comforts the agonized minds of those who seek his guidance. He saves people from suffering and trouble when vain is the help of man. This is, indeed, real service.

THE MYSTICISM OF POYGAI ALVAR

I

The World and its Cause

"Viewing the world as an earthen lamp, the deep ocean as ghee, and the hot-rayed sun as light, I offer the garland of hymns at the feet of the Lord who is armed with the luminous discus, for crossing over the ocean of sorrow." [1] [1]

The mind of a true devotee is constantly engrossed in the Lord. Neither time nor place stands in the way of the practice of devotion by him. Wherever he may be and whatever may be the time, he cannot but think of the Lord. Uninterrupted thought-stream suffused with intense love for the Lord is *bhakti*. True devotion leads to communion with God. Kṛṣṇa says in the *Bhagavad-gītā* (IX, 34): "Fix thy mind on Me; be devoted to Me; sacrifice to Me; bow down to Me. Thus having made thy mind steadfast in me as thy supreme goal, thou shalt come to me." Whatever the devotee offers is acceptable to the Lord. "Whoever with devotion offers Me a leaf, a flower, a fruit, or water, that I accept—the devout gift of the pure-minded." (*Gītā*, IX, 26) One can practise devotion through thought, word and deed. Whatever a devotee does is free from selfishness and out of sheer loving devotion to the Lord.

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1. வையம் தகளியா வார்கடலே நெய்யாக
வெய்ய கதிரோன் விளக்காக—செய்ய
சுடராழியான் அடிக்கே சூட்டினேன் சொன்மாலை
இடராழி நீங்குகவே என்று. [1]

The physical universe consisting of earth and other things which we cognize is real.[1] A pot which comes into existence requires a cause. Likewise the physical universe which comes into existence requires a cause, which cannot be anything else but the supreme God. This is one of the arguments by which the existence of God is sought to be proved. However, it is wrong to conclude from this that the Āḻvār argues for the existence of God by means of inference (*anumāna*). It is from Scripture alone that we come to know of God as the cause of the universe, as one endowed with infinite wisdom and infinite power, and so on. Though by means of inference we may establish that the world requires a cause, we can never conclude that the cause of the world is no other being than God. Considering the vastness and the wonder of the world, one may be justified in drawing the conclusion that its creator is one of great wisdom and power; but one cannot draw the conclusion that its creator is God who is real (*satyam*), knowledge (*jñānam*), and infinite (*anantam*), who is pure and blissful and so on. However, what is known through Scripture must be reflected upon through reasoning. And reasoning is a valuable supplement to Scripture. Through the practice of devotion and other means one must try to realize the truth taught in Scripture. The authentic experience of the Āḻvārs and other mystics testifies to the truth taught by Scripture.

II

Deeds of Redemption

"When the ocean was churned, I know not. Nor do I know the world which became yours by accepting the offering of water (from Mahābali). That ocean on which you constructed the embankment once upon a time and removed it (later) is the abode for you. This world is the one created by you, rescued by you (incarnating as

1. Even for the Advaitin, the external world exists as different from cognition, and endures as something real till Brahman-realization takes place.

Varāha from Hiraṇyākṣa), swallowed by you (for protecting it at the time of dissolution), and brought out later on."[1] [2]

To a mystic there is no need to prove the existence of God by means of rational arguments. None of the arguments such as the ontological, causal, and so on, are conclusive. Even if they are conclusive, we cannot know the nature of God through them. A mystic like Poygai Āḻvār realizes at the very sight of the ocean and the earth the presence of God everywhere. The visible things such as the earth and the ocean put the Āḻvār in a meditative mood. In the state of infused contemplation, the Āḻvār is raised from the level of the visible to that which is normally invisible to others. To his enraptured vision God is visible in everything and everywhere. He sees heaven in earth. The entire universe is charged with the grandeur of God. The visible things put him in a reminiscent mood making him recall the great deeds performed by the Lord for protecting those in distress. There is the assurance of Kṛṣṇa in the *Bhagavad-gītā* (VI, 30): "He who sees Me everywhere and sees everything in Me, of him will I never lose hold and he shall never lose hold of Me."

One will notice the meditative mood of the Āḻvār in the first two lines, and the reminiscent mood in the last two lines of the hymn stated above.

The Lord got the ocean churned and protected the gods (*devas*) by offering them the nectar obtained from the ocean. The entire universe is His. "In his hand *are* the deep places of the earth: the strength of the hills *is* his also. The sea *is* his, and he made it; and his hands formed the dry land." (*Psalm*, 95) He is the support (*ādhāra*) as well as the controller (*niyantā*) of the universe. But yet with a view to help Indra, He assumed the form of a dwarf, Vāmana, and asked

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1. என்று கடல் கடைந்தது? எவ்வுலகம் நீரேற்றது?
ஒன்றும் அதனை உணரேன் நான்—அன்று அது
அடைத்து உடைத்துக் கண்படுத்த ஆழி, இது நீ
படைத்து இடந்து உண்டு உமிழ்ந்த பார். [2]

of Mahābali just three feet of ground as gift. Then assuming the cosmic form, He measured the entire universe in two steps. As there was no more ground for the third measure, Mahābali offered his own head to be measured. By placing his foot on the head of Mahābali, the Lord sent him down to the nether world. These two deeds exemplify the redemptive will of the Lord.

Though these events took place once upon a time, it appears to the Āḻvār whose mind is filled with the the thought of the Lord as though the ocean full of waves and foam has been churned only a little while ago. It looks as though he sees the imprint of the Lord's feet left on the world when He measured it. It is not out of inquisitiveness that Poygai Āḻvār wants to know *when* the ocean was churned, or *when* He accepted the gift of three feet of land from Mahābali. When the Āḻvār says, "I know not any of them," it is only to express his profound regret that he did not have the good fortune of witnessing them when the Lord performed those acts of redemption.

Meditation is followed by reminiscence. Meditation on the visible things reminds the Āḻvār of some other deeds performed by the Lord. In a reminiscent mood, he first refers to the construction once upon a time of an embankment on the ocean by the Lord incarnating as Rāma for reaching Laṅkā, and the removal of it later on. Then he remembers the intimate relation between the world and God. The Lord, says the Āḻvār, not only created the world, but also wrested it from Hiraṇyākṣa, swallowed it with a view to protect it at the time of deluge, and again brought it out.

The philosophical idea that is sought to be conveyed here is that the physical universe is completely dependent on God, for, as the *Taittirīya Upaniṣad* (III i, 3) says, the universe comes out of Him, is supported by Him, and is finally resolved in Him. God is both the efficient and the material cause (*abhinna-nimittopādānakāraṇa*) rolled into one. Creation and dissolution alternate like day and night. Creation is followed by dissolution, and dissolution by creation. Creation, maintenance, and dissolution of the world are for the purpose of helping the jīvas attain liberation.

III

One Reality in Many Forms

"Hara is the name of the one, and Nārāyaṇa that of the other. Bull is the vehicle for the one, and the white-headed kite for the other. (Śaiva) *Āgama* is the source of our knowledge of the one, and the *Veda* that of the other. The mountain (Kailāsa) is the abode of the one, and the milky ocean that of the other. While one performs the function of destruction, the other that of protection. The one is armed with the trident, and the other with the discus. The form of the one is like the glowing fire, while that of the other is like the dark cloud. For both the body is one."[1][5]

A mystic, whether he is of the extrovert or of the introvert type, whether he is from the East or the West, speaks of the oneness of all things. The experience of unity—the experience that all is one—is considered to be one of the important characteristics of mysticism. Meister Eckhart says: "All that a man has here externally in multiplicity is intrinsically one. Here all blades of grass, wood, and stone, all things are one. This is the deepest depth." Normally in our everyday experience, grass is understood as different from wood, and wood as different from stone. Nevertheless, a mystic like Eckhart intuits them as one. Eckhart makes a distinction between the level of understanding and the level above understanding. When a person sees one thing as different from another, he is at the level of understanding; but when he sees all in all, *i.e.* when he intuits the oneness of all things, he is above the level of understanding. What Eckhart calls the stage of pure understanding is the standpoint of reason, and

1. அரன் நாரணன் நாமம், ஆன்விடை புள் ஊர்தி
உரை நூல் மறை, உறையும் கோயில்—வரை நீர்
கருமம் அழிப்பு அளிப்புக் கையது வேல் நேமி
உருவம் எரி கார், மேனி ஒன்று. [5]

what he calls the stage above understanding is the standpoint of intuition. That there is a stage which transcends understanding or reason wherein one realizes the oneness of all things is frequently referred to in the *Upaniṣad*. The *Īśa Upaniṣad* (6), for example, says, "He who sees all beings in his own Self, and his own Self in all beings, eels no hatred by reason of such a view."

Mystics all over the world have affirmed that all is one, and that the one reality is seen in different forms as different objects. It is the One that appears as the many—as stocks and stones, as a plurality of individuals, and as gods and goddesses of the pantheon. There is a text of the *Yajur-veda* (XXXI, 19) which says: "Though unborn, It appears to be born in diverse ways." The *Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad* (II, V, 19) declares: "Indra (*i.e.* the Supreme Being), on account of *māyā*, is perceived as manifold." Though the ultimate reality is beyond form, name, and characterization, we view it, limited as we are, in a particular form, as male or female, give it names such as Śiva, Viṣṇu, Śakti, and so on, and endow it with various attributes and functions. A well-known passage in the *Śvetāśvatara Upaniṣad* (IV, ii, 3) is relevant in this context. It says, speaking of the ultimate reality, "That, indeed, is fire, that is the sun, that is the wind, and that is the moon. That, indeed, is the pure. That is *Brahmā*. That is the waters. That is the creator of all." It adds: "Thou art woman, thou art man. Thou art the youth, thou art the maiden. Thou art the old man tottering with his staff. Thou facest everywhere." One may choose any particular God according to one's inclination and training for the purpose of worship, prayer, and meditation. The conception of personal God (*iṣṭa-devatā*) finds an important place in Hinduism.

Since every form of God is a manifestation of the One, it is meaningless to think of one form of God as superior, and another as inferior. It follows, therefore, that Śiva and Viṣṇu, which are manifestations of the supreme reality, are one, though it is open to a devotee to worship any one of these two forms, or both, or any other form according to his inclination and training.

Poygai Āḻvār testifies to the oneness of the Supreme Being mainfested as Śiva and Viṣṇu in the hymn stated above. He gives a

beautiful description of Śiva and Viṣṇu, which is not wanting in essential details, as understood by the devotees. Gifted as he is with mystical intuition, he is able to realize their oneness. The two, Śiva and Viṣṇu, are distinct at the level of understanding ; but they become one at the level above understanding, *i.e.* at the intuitive level of mysticism. Blades of grass, wood, and stone are no doubt different when we view them through reason. But they become one to a mystic like Eckhart at the level of intuition. Distinctions cease to exist and opposites coincide in mystical intuition. To a mystic, grass is wood, and wood is grass, and all are one. This looks absurd and untenable to us, and we fail to see the point of the mystic. To a mystic like Poygai Āḻvar, both Hara and Nārāyaṇa are one. To him at the mystical level distinctions fade out, opposites coincide, and the basic unity in all its vividness emerges. This may appear to be absurd and untenable to us at the level of understanding or reason, and consequently we fail to see the truth realized by Poygai Āḻvār and other mystics.

The gulf between the two levels of reason and intuition is the handiwork of ignorance (*avidyā*). Reason or understanding which is conditioned by *avidyā* divides, as it were, the one reality and introduces therein all sorts of distinctions. And so the probing eye of reason does not see the oneness of reality, but sees only diversity of forms. We catch hold of the multiple forms and lose sight of the One, what the *Upaniṣad* calls " the effulgent eternal principle " and what Shelley calls " the white radiance of eternity ". Shelley says :

" The One remains, the many change and pass ;
Heaven's light for ever shines, earth's shadows fly.
Life like a dome of many-coloured glass
Stains the white radiance of eternity. "

We will see only plurality when we look through the many-coloured glass of reason which is stained by *avidyā*. To intuit oneness, as the Āḻvār does, one must rise to the level of mystical intuition which is a medium altogether different from reason.

IV

Certainty of God-realization

"Even then (before birth) when I was lying in the womb, did I worship with the hand united in the direction of the Lord who resides in Śrīraṅgam, and saw Him. Even for a moment I have not forgotten the Lord who is of the colour of the ocean full of waves. O ye poor! How can I forget Him now?"[1] [6]

Normally it is not possible for a person to recollect the experience he had in the first few years of his infancy, or when he was lying in the womb unless he is specially gifted with supernatural powers. That mystics speak of the God-experience attained by them in the post-natal state either all on a sudden or as a result of the pursuit of a rigorous discipline, is well-known. There are also cases of mystics who speak of their God-experience in the pre-natal condition when they were lying in the womb. That Poygai Āḻvār is one such gifted soul to have not only the experience of God while lying in the womb, but also the extraordinary power to recollect that experience, is obvious from the hymn under consideration.

William Wordsworth speaks of "a presence" which gave him the joy of elevated thoughts. Being more certain about that "presence" than we are of the things we see in our normal waking consciousness, he declares very emphatically, "I have felt a presence....." "a spirit that impels all thinking things, all objects of all thought, and rolls through all things." Poygai Āḻvār is equally certain about the God-experience he had even as he was lying in the womb. The case of Poygai Āḻvār is not a solitary one in this regard. There were also other mystics who claimed such an experience.

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1. ஒன்றும் மறந்தறியேன் ஒதநீர் வண்ணனை நான்
இன்று மறப்பனே ஏழைகாள்—அன்று
கரு அரங்கத்துள் கிடந்து கைதொழுதேன், கண்டேன்
திருவரங்க மேயான் திசை. [6]

Addressing the Lord of Tiruppādirippuliyūr, Tirunāvukkarasar says that when he was lying in the womb he was thinking only about the feet of the Lord, and that after his birth he learnt His name through His grace and applied the sacred ash offering obeisance to Him. He implores the Lord to provide him the way to the goal which is none other than His own being. We have a reference in the *Aitareya Upaniṣad* (II, i, 5) to the experience which the sage Vāmadeva had while lying in the womb and the saving knowledge he attained even then which enabled him to come out of the meshes of bondage. Vāmadeva says: "Even while lying in the vomb, I came to know of the birth of all the gods. A hundred iron citadels held me down. Then, like a hawk, I forced my way through by dint of the knowledge of the Self."

It is necessary to note the tone of certainty with which Poygai Āḻvār speaks of his experience of God. He says that while lying in the womb he worshipped the Lord who has taken His abode at Śrīraṅgam, and as a result of worship *saw* Him. There is no reason to think that the Āḻvār misreports his experience. Further, the Āḻvār did not attain the knowledge of God through any process of reasoning. His condition when he was in the womb was such that he had neither a developed mind nor the instruments of knowledge fit enough for action at that time. Nevertheless, he recollects the God-experience he had at that time, and claims that he was in touch with a reality which is outside and beyond himself. Though his experience is subjective, the object of his experience is trans-subjective. It is, therefore, wrong to treat the mystical experience of God, which Poygai Āḻvār and other mystics had, as an emotional state, and nothing else than that. The experience which Poygai Āḻvār speaks of is the perceptual experience of God, involving Self-transcendence.

God alone is the invaluable treasure which neither perishes through time or any other agency nor becomes scarce through sharing by His devotees. Those who do not possess this treasure of God through intuitive realization, is, indeed, poor, according to Poygai Āḻvār. Inasmuch as he had already worshipped and realized the Lord even in the pre-natal stage, it is impossible, the Āḻvār declares, to forget the Lord in the post-natal state when he is in possession of

the fully developed mind and the organs of knowledge. Recollecting his experience, he further claims that he never forgot the Lord even for a while.

V

Modes of Bhakti

"My mouth will not praise anyone but the Lord. My hands will not worship anyone but Viṣṇu who (as Trivikrama) measured the world in three strides. My eyes will not see anything except the form of the Lord, and my ears will not hear anything except the name of the Lord, who consumed the poison smeared on the breast of the demoness, Pūtanai."[1] [11]

In this hymn, Poygai Āḻvār refers to some of the modes of *bhakti*. For the practice of *bhakti* control of the mind is necessary. If so, how is the mind to be controlled?

One must make proper use of one's body, senses, and mind. The different organs of knowledge and action are given to us only for the purpose of knowing and adoring God, and for serving others. They should not be allowed to go outward in search of objects of pleasure. If they go outward, they will be entangled in the external objects of desire which are impermanent. One does not have peace of mind so long as one's mind is trammelled and agitated by desires which crop up one after another. Desires cannot be extinguished by their fulfilment. On the contrary, they grow by what they feed on. The mind cannot remain quiet when it is drawn outward by the senses. Only when it is quiescent, concentration will be possible. For attaining concentration or one-pointedness of the mind, which presupposes control of the mind and the organs, it is necessary to turn the

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1. வாய் அவனே அல்லது வாழ்த்தாது, கை உலகம்
தாயவனே அல்லது தாம் தொழா—பேய்முலை நஞ்சு
ஊணாக உண்டான் உருவொடு பேரல்லால்
காணாகண் கேளா செவி. [11]

mind and the organs inward and make them dwell constantly on God, the indwelling Self in all beings. If the mind and the senses are allowed to go astray from the thought of God, and if the body is allowed to indulge in bad conduct, the attainment of the goal which is God-realization through concentration of the mind is not possible. The *Kaṭha Upaniṣad* (I, ii, 24) says: "One who has not desisted from bad conduct, whose senses are not under control, whose mind is not concentrated, whose mind is not free from anxiety, cannot attain this Self through knowledge."

In the Viśiṣṭādvaita and Śrīvaiṣṇava tradition, purification of the body (*kāya-śuddhi*) is called *viveka*, and purification of the mind (*sattva-śuddhi*) is known as *vimoka*. These are the first two steps in the sevenfold discipline (*sādhana-saptaka*) for the practice of *bhakti*. It means that the body should be disciplined through food and exercise, and that the mind controlled by freeing it from desire and aversion. As a result of the purification of the body and the mind, *abhyāsa* or continuous contemplation on the Lord, which is the third step in the ladder of *bhakti*, is made possible.

It is necessary here to explain the connotation of the term *bhakti*. In the course of his commentary on the *Gītā* text, XIV, 26, Śaṅkara observes that *bhakti* is service and that it is itself *yoga*, as it leads to the union with God (*bhajanam bhaktiḥ, saiva yogaḥ*). It means that to practise *bhakti* one must resort to service. *Bhakti* consists in rendering service wholeheartedly, unselfishly, and with the belief that the person to whom service is rendered is worthy of it. A life of genuine service to God and His devotees is a life of *bhakti* or love.

If *bhakti* or love consists in service, could we think of any model here? According to Evelyn Underhill, the service of a sheep-dog should be our model of love. A good sheep-dog at work, Underhill says, "is not an emotional animal. He goes on with his job quite steadily; takes no notice of bad weather, rough ground, or of his own comfort. He seldom or never stops to be stroked..." So to practise *bhakti* one must do service to God and others; and one must render service like a good sheep-dog.

Bhakti as service to God is of nine kinds. There is first *śravaṇam* which is listening to the auspicious qualities of the Lord. Uttering the sacred qualities of God is *kīrtanam*, which is the second variety of *bhakti*. *Smaraṇam* which is recollection of the auspicious qualities of the Lord is the third kind of *bhakti*. The next one is *pādasevanam* which is service to the feet of the Lord. The fifth one is called *arcanam* which consists in worshipping the consecrated images of God in the sacred temples. Obeisance to the images installed in the sacred temples is called *vandanam*, which is the sixth kind of *bhakti*. The seventh one, called *dāsyam*, consists in playing the role of a faithful servant to the Lord. Friendship with the Lord known as *sakhyam* is the next variety. And the last one is called *ātmanivedanam* which means self-oblation to God. One can practise *bhakti* in any of these forms for the purpose of attaining union with God. Kṛṣṇa says in the *Gītā* (XIV, 26): "He who serves me with unfailing devotion of love, he, crossing beyond those three guṇas, is fit for becoming Brahman."

Kīrtanam, *vandanam*, and *śravaṇam* are the forms of *bhakti* emphasized by Poygai Āḻvār in this hymn. There is bound to be difference among the devotees in their practice of *bhakti*. Modes of *bhakti* differ as minds of men differ. A particular form of *bhakti* which is appealing to one may not be appealing to another; and so there is difference in the modes of *bhakti*. Nevertheless, all forms of *bhakti* are equally valuable. They are complementary in their character. They contribute to only one music—the music of spiritual life. The differences among them which we notice are but variations in spiritual symphony.

VI

Means to God-realization

"The five senses, *viz* the ear, the mouth (*i.e.* the tongue), the eye, the nose, and the skin; the body composed of the five elements, *viz* the red fire, earth, air, water, and ether; the ceaseless knowledge (or knowledge which turns into *bhakti*), sacrifice, and

virtues—these are the means to attain Viṣṇu, who incarnated in the form of a boar."[1] [12]

Practice of scripture-ordained karmas, possession of virtues, knowledge, and *bhakti* are necessary for God-realization. The *Bṛhadāraṇyaka* (IV, iv, 22) says: "The Brāhmaṇas seek to know it through the study of the Vedas, sacrifice, charity, austerity..." Poygai Āḻvār speaks of all of these as means to God-realization in the hymn given above.

In this hymn, reference is first of all made to the five organs of knowledge (*jñānendriya*), *viz* the visual, auditory, olfactory, gustatory and tactile senses. These are the external senses through which knowledge of things outside is obtained. Mind must also function along with the senses for obtaining the knowledge of external things. It is through the mind which is the internal sense that we get the knowledge of subjective states such as pleasure and pain.

Reference is then made in the hymn to the five elements, *viz* earth, water, fire, air, and ether, out of which the human body is composed. The body, the mind, and the senses are necessary for the practice of *bhakti* and the pursuit of knowledge. They must be controlled and disciplined; only then are they indirect aids to God-realization.

Poygai Āḻvār then speaks of scripture-ordained karmas, virtues, and knowledge as means to God-realization. Three expressions used by him in this connection are *jñānam*, *veḷvi*, and *nallaram*. *Jñānam* means knowledge. Following the Viśiṣṭādvaita and Śrīvaiṣṇava tradition, it may be explained as *bhakti*. *Veḷvi* is sacrifice. *Nallaram* is virtue.

According to Viśiṣṭādvaita and Śrīvaiṣṇavism, the sequence of discipline for attaining release is *karma-yoga*, *jñāna-yoga* and *bhakti-yoga*.

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1. செவி வாய் கண் மூக்கு உடல் என்று ஐம்புலனும், செந்தீ
புவி கால் நீர் விண் பூதமைந்தும்—அவியாத
ஞானமும் வேள்வியும் நல்லறமும் என்பரே
ஏனமாய் நின்றார்க்கு இயல்பு. [12]

Like Advaita, Viśiṣṭādvaita maintains that the body and the senses, the practice of *karma* without attachment to the fruit thereof and the cultivation of virtues, are but remote aids to God-realization. It says that all these are conducive to *bhakti*, which is the direct means to God-realization. The practice of *niṣkāma-karma* brings about the purification of the mind. The spiritual aspirant at this stage does not view *karma* in terms of utility, and is free from the egoistic feeling of "I" and "mine". Through *jñāna-yoga*, which follows *karma-yoga*, the spiritual aspirant attains self-knowledge. He realizes that the self is different from *prakṛti*, and enjoys, by withdrawing his mind and the senses from external things, spiritual solitude and freedom called *kaivalya*. The stage of self-knowledge achieved through *jñāna-yoga* must lead to *bhakti*. It means that the *jñāni* himself must become a *bhakta*. It may be noted here that, according to Viśiṣṭādvaita, there is no gulf separating *jñāna* and *bhakti*, and that knowledge itself, as a result of repeated contemplation, turns into *bhakti*. Hence the oft-quoted expression "*bhaktirūpāpannajñāna.*" Accordingly, the word *jñāna* occurring in the third line of the hymn is explained as *bhakti*.

It is necessary in this connection to draw attention to the significance of the two terms, *para-bhakti* and *parama-bhakti*, employed in the Śrīvaiṣṇava tradition. *Bhakti* as the means to the realization of the supreme God is called *para-bhakti*; and it can arise only as a result of the practice of the ethics of *niṣkāma-karma* and the possession of the knowledge of the supreme God as the support, controller and indwelling self of the sentient *jīva* and the insentient *prakṛti*. When this knowledge of the supreme God, called *parajñāna*, as a result of the continuous, uninterrupted meditation, deepens into the supreme love of God, it is termed *parama-bhakti*.

Viśiṣṭādvaita formulates the sevenfold discipline called *sādhana-saptaka* for the practice of *bhakti*. This discipline comprises the cultivation of the following: (1) *viveka*, (2) *vimoka*, (3) *abhyāsa* (4) *kriyā*, (5) *kalyāṇa*, (6) *anavasāda*, and (7) *anuddharṣa*. *Viveka* is purification of the body through food and exercise. *Vimoka* is purification of the mind by overcoming desire and aversion. *Abhyāsa* is repeated contemplation on God, the indwelling Self. *Kriyā* is the

performance of the fivefold duties to subhuman species, fellow beings, teachers, forefathers, and gods. The practice of truthfulness, non-violence, and so on, is called *kalyāṇa*. *Anavasādha* is freedom from despair, and *anuddharṣa* is absence of exaltation. A devotee must be in possession of these virtues in order to practise *bhakti*.

Is *bhakti* a discipline or *yoga* which can be practised by an aspirant through endeavour? The two schools of Śrīvaiṣṇavism differ in their answer to this question. While the Northern school (*Vaḍakalai*) holds the view that *bhakti* is the means which can be accomplished by a devotee and therefore thinks of it as *sādhyopāya*, the Southern school (*Tenkalai*) maintains that God is both the means (*upāya*) and the end (*upeya*), and that unless He shows the way and provides the means, there is nothing which an individual can accomplish by his endeavour. It means that God is both the impelling force (*prāpaka*) and the end (*prāpya*). Man being what he is under the control of *avidyā* and *karma* which are dead weights on him and "with the thousand natural shocks that flesh is heir to', he cannot do anything on his own unless he is helped by God. To be in possession of virtues and other qualifications for the practice of *bhakti*, God's grace is necessary. It is not virtue that calls out the act of God, but it is the act of God that makes one virtuous. One does not become righteous by doing righteous deeds, but one does righteous deeds only in so far as one is made righteous through the grace of God. In short, God must take hold of man and choose him to be the beneficiary of His grace. The *Kaṭha Upaniṣad* (I, ii, 23) says: "Whom He chooses, unto him He reveals." There is a similar view in the Christian tradition also. There is, for instance, a text from the *Romans* (IX, 16): "So then it is not of him that willeth, nor of him that runneth, but of God that showeth mercy." It means, as Augustine put it, "We could neither will nor run unless He stirred us and put the motive force in us." Further, the redemptive act of God is not causally determined. It cannot be explained in terms of the merit of the individual. Since God Himself is the means whose operation is not dependent on any merit in man, the *Tenkalai* school thinks of God as *nirapekṣa-upāya*. It also looks upon divine grace as *nirhetuka-kaṭākṣa* as it operates without any reference to the merit of the individual. So according to the *Tenkalai* school, Poygai

Āḻvār in the hymn quoted above pities those who think of *bhakti* as well as the preliminary discipline it presupposes as the means to be accomplished by the will of man for attaining God-realization. The word "*enbare*" which occurs in the third line of the hymn is interpreted as "*enbaro*" expressing astonishment at those who think of *bhakti* as well as its accessories as the means under the control of man. The truth is that *bhakti*, according to the *Tenkalai* school, is not *sādhyopāya*, the means amenable to human endeavour.

Reference must be made to another point stressed by the *Tenkalai* school. A devotee of the superior type will consider *bhakti* as an end in itself and not as a means to something else. *Bhakti* may be evaluated from three points of view—*first*, as a means to such ends as prosperity, spiritual solitude and freedom called *kaivalya*, which are inferior to God-realization; *second*, as a means to God-realization which is the highest end; and third, as an end in itself and not as a means to anything whatsoever. A devotee of the superior type will not care for anything except *bhakti*. He will not be attracted even by *mukti*, if it were a state without any scope for the practice of *bhakti*. Such a devotee who lives, moves, and has his being in *bhakti* is termed a *paramaikāntin*, one who is exclusively devoted to *bhakti* as an end in itself.

There are mystics who speak not only about their God-experience, but also about the way to that experience. Plotinus, Eckhart, and Al-Ghazzali—to mention only a few—are some of the outstanding mystics of this type. They are those who are capable of philosophical analysis and psychological description of the path and the destination. Sometimes they speak in symbolical and paradoxical language. But they also convey their ideas in a language which is simple and direct giving a wealth of details. They do this for the benefit of others. Poygai Āḻvār also belongs to this category of mystics. He is a mystic and a philosopher as well.

VII

Different Ways of Worship

"Every one, according to one's understanding, considering this God or that as the supreme being, praises and

worships Him by drawing a picture of him on the wall or by installing an image of him. The divine form of *Trivikrama* who measured the world is supreme."[1] [14]

In this hymn Poygai Āḻvār speaks of the different forms of worship of the supreme Being by devotees who are mentally of different nature.

The supreme Being, which is one and which is free from forms and attributes, is worshipped in different forms amd with different attributes by devotees, each according to his faith (*śraddhā*). A person is what he is because of his faith; and the faith of each one is dependent upon the nature (*svabhāva*) of his mind, which may be *sāttvic*, or *rājasic*, or *tāmasic*. On the basis of the nature of the mind, the spiritual aspirants may be classified into three groups—those who are *sāttvic*, those who are *rājasic*, and those who are *tāmasic*. Speaking about the faith of a devotee whose mind is conditioned by a particular *guṇa* which predominantes—*sattva*, *rajas* or *tamas* as the case may be—Lord Kṛṣṇa says in the *Bhagavad-gītā* (VII, 3): "The faith of each one is in accordance with his nature, O Bhārata. The man is made up of his faith; as a man's faith is, so is he." So according to his own faith as determined by a *guṇa*, a person worships a particular God or other divinities or beings such as Vasus, Kubera, and so on. All these beings, when worshipped, answer the prayers of the devotees by granting their respective desires. The following two verses from the *Bhagavad-gītā* (VII, 21-22) are relevant in this context: "Whatever devotee seeks to worship with faith, what form so ever, that same faith of his I make unflinching;" "Possessed of that faith he engages in the worship of that (form); thence he obtains his desires, these being indeed ordained by me." In the first verse the Lord assures the devotee of His help to keep him steadfast in his faith whatever it may be; and in the second, there is the assurance of the fulfilment of his desires as a reward for the practice of worship.

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1. அவரவர் தாம் தாம் அறிந்தவாறு ஏத்தி
இவரிவர் எம்பெருமான் என்று—சுவர்மிசைச்
சார்த்தியும் வைத்தும் தொழுவர், உலகளந்த
மூர்த்தி உருவே முதல். [14]

The one supreme Being is manifested in the numerous gods and goddesses of the pantheon. It is difficult for an ordinary devotee to meditate on Brahman, the supreme Being, which is *nirguṇa*. Worship of God as endowed with attributes is, therefore, of great help to him. According to his own understanding and qualification, a devotee is drawn to the worship of a particular God. And he may worship the God of his choice in his own way. He may worship his personal God (*iṣṭa-devatā*) by uttering His name and praising His greatness. Or, he may worship a picture or image of Him by invoking His presence therein. Or, he may meditate on some symbol like *aum* (*praṇava*) signifying God. His worship of god may also take other forms such as prayer, repeating *mantras*, listening to chanted liturgies, and visiting temples and holy places.

As a devotee of Viṣṇu, Poygai Āḻvār says that *Trivikrama*, an incarnation of Viṣṇu, is supreme; and he offers his obeisance to him.

VIII

The Redemptive Grace of God

"The trinity alone is the principal cause (of the world). Of this trinity, Viṣṇu who has the colour of the great sea, is foremost. Without the grace of God who is supreme and good, the grace of others in this world, which is surrounded by the sea, is useless."[1] [15]

Brahmā, Viṣṇu, and Rudra who constitute the trinity (*trimūrti*) in Hinduism are the manifestations of the supreme Being. Each one of them is assigned a particular cosmic function—Brahmā, that of creating the world, Viṣṇu, that of maintaining it, and Rudra, that of destroying it. A devotee who worships any of these Gods considers the God of his choice (*iṣṭa-devatā*) as supreme. As a devotee of Viṣṇu,

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1. முதலாவார் மூவரே, அம்மூவர் உள்ளும்
முதலாவான் மூரிநீர் வண்ணன்—முதலாய
நல்லான் அருளல்லால் நாமநீர் வையகத்துப்
பல்லார் அருளும் பழுது. [15]

Poygai Āḻvār looks upon Viṣṇu, whose colour is described as that of the great sea, as supreme and emphasizes His saving grace in this hymn.

In the first two lines of the hymn reference is made to the trinity and the supremacy of Viṣṇu who is the personal God of the Āḻvār. The last two lines of the hymn stress the greatness and excellence of the divine grace.

God is perfect, for He is endowed with all sacred qualities, and there is no place for profane qualities in Him. The *Chāndogya Upaniṣad* (VIII, 1, 5) speaks of God "as free from sin, free from old age, free from death, free from sorrow... whose desire is the real, whose thought is the real." The *Viṣṇupurāṇa*, (VI, 582-583) declares : "He transcends the matter of all beings, its modifications, properties, and imperfections. He transcends all obscuring influences, He who is the self of all. All auspicious qualities constitute His nature." A being who is perfect must necessarily be good; and so God who has all auspicious qualities without any trace of imperfection is good. He is *amala*. It may be stated here that *amalatva*, according to Viśiṣṭādvaita, is one of the determining qualities (*svarūpa-nirūpaka-dharma*) of God. Poygai Āḻvār speaks of God as "*nallān*", one who is good, in the third line of the hymn. He is "*nallān*" because He does good to His devotees.

God is not only perfect and good, but great as well. There is nothing comparable in the world to the greatness of the divine grace. There is nothing in this life nor in the next which can redeem one excepting the divine grace. Man needs God alone by cleaving to whom he is virtuous as well as happy. The divine grace is unique. There is no substitute to it. The help from others, individually or collectively, is of no avail for achieving the highest end, for it is neither unlimited nor spiritually uplifting. The grace of God alone can save one and not the succour of even the supreme sovereign, who indeed suffers more of mortal gifts than his worshippers. It is, therefore, futile, declares the Āḻvār, to worship anyone but God.

IX

Regret for Godless Life

"I saw and worshipped the feet of the Lord who, being touched by the waves of the ocean, is in *yoga-nidrā* on the bed of Ādiśeṣa, whose eyes are red, and who has the colour of the mighty ocean. I wept in anguish that many days were spent uselessly (before I saw him)."[1] [16]

Normally a person is awake during the day time and sleeps in the night. A good part of our precious life is wasted in sleep. The life that one leads yielding to the temptations of the senses while being awake is utterly useless, for it is a godless life. A person who leads such a life, though wide awake, is really in sleep. He is in the night of ignorance. Day is also night to him. Real awakening is God-realization. So long as a person does not realize God, he is in the night under the sway of sleep. But a mystic who has subdued the senses and who has shaken off the sleep of ignorance (*avidyā*) is fully awake to the supreme reality. He is, indeed, in the waking state; he will no more be in the state of sleep. What is night to an ignorant man, is day to a God-realized soul. What is day to a man of God-realization is night to an ignorant one.

In the sixth hymn there is reference to God-realization which Poygai Āḻvār attained even as he was lying in the womb. From "sleep" he has woken up. The time that he spent prior to God-realization, the Āḻvār now says, is a total waste. Many lives he must have gone through before he was blessed with God-realization through the divine grace. The Āḻvār feels sorry that he wasted time for which he could not but weep. The regret expressed by him reminds us of Saint Tirunāvukkarasar's lamentation that he spent many days without seeking

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1. பழுதே பலபகலும் போயினவென்று அஞ்சி
அழுதேன், அரவணைமேல் கண்டு—தொழுதேன்
கடலோதம் காலலைப்பக் கண்வளரும் செங்கண்
அடலோத வண்ணர் அடி. [16]

God, who is the sacred way to the devotees, who protects them without falling into the encircling hell, who is beyond, who has made the *Ārdrā* (*Tiruvādirai*) day sacred, who has the third eye in the forehead, and who is the first in the trinity.

Like Tirunāvukkarasar, Poygai Āḻvār has been redeemed by God who by choosing him has revealed to him. From the time of God-realization he is in the "waking state". Inasmuch as he has realized God, time cannot now waste him by taking revenge on him for what he did earlier. Contrast this with what King Richard II says, "I wasted time, and now doth time waste me."[1] Poygai Āḻvār has no regret, lucky as he was to be the beneficiary of the divine grace.

X

The Good Luck of the Milky Ocean

"O, black Ocean! You are in stupor due to your physical contact all the time with the Lord when He is in *yoga-nidrā* — the Lord with red eyes, dark in colour, and armed with the discus, who slept on the banyan leaf after having kept the world inside Him (at the time of dissolution). What penance did you perform (for this good luck)?"[2] [19]

In this hymn, Poygai Āḻvār compares his lot with that of the milky ocean.

Time was when the Āḻvār being engrossed in things sensuous was indifferent to the Lord, although he did not think of anything excepting the Lord from the time he worshipped and saw Him. The Āḻvār seems to think that the milky ocean is more fortunate than himself, for,

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1. Shakespeare, *Richard II*, V, 5.
2. மாலும் கருங்கடலே என்னேற்றாய், வையகம் உண்டு
ஆலினிலைத் துயின்ற ஆழியான்—கோலக்
கருமேனிச் செங்கண்மால் கண்படையுள் என்றும்
திருமேனி நீ தீண்டப்பெற்று. [19]

unlike the Āḻvār, it has been in union with the Lord all the time. Being overwhelmed by the joy of union with the Lord, it is in a state of utter amazement. Poygai Āḻvār wants to know the penance that the ocean did for attaining the blessed state in which it finds itself.

Though the milky ocean is white in colour, it has become dark, because of the reflection of the Lord who is dark in colour. Hence the expression *karuṅgaḍal* (black ocean) used by the Āḻvār.

XI

Supremacy and Easy Accessibility of God

"O Lord ! you ride on Garuḍa who has shining wings. I am not the only person who knows the scar in you caused by the cord with which you were tied down by Yaśodā, whose soft shoulders are like the bamboo, for having eaten stealthily the fragrant butter churned by her. The entire world knows it."[1] [22]

Supremacy (*paratva*) and easy accessibility (*saulabhya*) are two of the important characteristics of God. God is the supreme ruler of the entire universe. However, He is easily accessible to the devotees who pine for union with Him through service and prayer. The very fact that Kṛṣṇa, an incarnation of Viṣṇu, who is supreme and boundless, allowed himself to be tied down by Yaśodā, his foster-mother, for the mischievous act of stealing the butter, brings out the easy accessibility of the Lord. The *Īśa Upaniṣad* (5) says, "That (Brahman) is far off ; That is very near." It is, indeed, a paradox beyond human comprehension that God who is supreme and remote should play the role of a child, and be so near as to be easily accessible for no other purpose than to make the devotee the beneficiary of His grace.

Many things which are great in the world are not easy of attainment. Things which can be easily attained are not usually great. The

1. அறியும் உலகெல்லாம் யானேயும் அல்லேன்
பொறி கொள் சிறை உவணம் ஊர்ந்தாய்—வெறிகமழும்
காம்பேய் மென் தோளி கடைவெண்ணெய் உண்டாயைத்
தாம்பே கொண்டு ஆர்த்த தழும்பு. [22]

divine supremacy is such that it is easily accessible. Though it is within our reach, it does not on that account lose its greatness and supremacy. What is unique in the case of God is the happy combination of supremacy and easy accessibility. Poygai Āḻvār lays emphasis on both these aspects in this hymn. While he refers to the supremacy of God speaking of Him as riding on the mighty Garuḍa, he brings out God's easy accessibility by mentioning the episode of Yaśodā fastening the divine play-boy, Kṛṣṇa, with a cord. The scar in his body is a good livery of his redemptive act. The whole world, declares Poygai Āḻvār, knows it.

XII

Knowing Scripture Alone Will Not Do

"My mind, without stopping with scriptural knowledge, will come up by praising always the Lord, who lies down on the milky ocean like the green emarald set on a mountain, who tore the body of Hiraṇya, and who, incarnating as *Varāha*, recovered the world."[1] [25]

Mere scriptural knowledge will not do for attaining God-realization. It must be supplemented, according to Poygai Āḻvār, by constant meditation on God. This is the central idea conveyed by this hymn.

Scripture is the means (*pramāṇa*) for getting the knowledge of God. Since the knowledge obtained therefrom is mediate (*parokṣa*), it has to be made immediate (*aparokṣa*) by constant meditation on God. In order to practise meditation, the mind must be made to dwell constantly on God, by chanting His names, by praising His greatness, and so on.

In the first line of the hymn, Poygai Āḻvār lays stress on the fact that scriptural knowledge alone, though necessary, is not adequate for

1. உரைமேற் கொண்டு என் உள்ளம் ஓவாது எப்போதும்
வரைமேல் மரகதமே போல—திரைமேல்
கிடந்தானைக் கீண்டானைக் கேழலாய்ப் பூமி
இடந்தானை ஏத்தி எழும். [25]

attaining God-realization. He refers to the importance of praising the greatness of God, which is a spiritual practice, for God-realization in the last line of the hymn.

The expression *urai-meṛkoṇḍu* may be construed as *mel urai koṇḍu, melāna urai koṇḍu,* conveying the meaning "with good or sacred words". In that case, the meaning of the hymn is this: "My mind will come up by praising always the Lord through good or sacred words—the Lord who lies down on the milky ocean..."

XIII

Greatness of the Veṅkaṭa Hill

"The hill of *Tiruveṅkaṭa* which puts out the fire of evil deeds (which obstruct the attainment of the goal) of those who bid good bye to the Lord after having attained *kaivalya*, and of those who dwell worshipping always the Lord, who wears the fresh basil, is the one which kindles the flame of the mind (*i.e.* knowledge) of the eternals (*nityasūris*)."[1] [26]

Para, vyūha, vibhava, antaryāmin, and *arcā* are the five forms of Brahman. Brahman as *para* is the transcendental Absolute. The *vyūha* aspect of Brahman is the power which creates, sustains, and destroys the universe. Brahman who is the indwelling self in all beings is the *antaryāmin. Vibhava* is the incarnation of Brahman in a particular form playing the role of a saviour. *Arcā* is the permanent incarnation of Brahman worshipped in a temple by the devotees. In view of the fact that *para, vyūha,* and *vibhava* cannot be directly experienced by us now, special importance is attached to *arcāvatāra* by the Āḻvārs. Though all the five forms of Brahman are from the philoso-

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1. எழுவார் விடைகொள்வார் ஈன் துழாயாகின
வழுவா வகை நினைந்து வைகல்—தொழுவார்
வினைச் சுடரை நந்துவிக்கும் வேங்கடமே வானோர்
மனச் சுடரைத் தூண்டும் மலை. [26]

phical point of view of equal value, from the point of view of the spiritual aspirant *arcāvatāra* is more valuable than others, since the permanent divine form in which God's grace (*kṛpā*) is concretely manifested is easily accessible at any time to the earnest devotees.

One such permanent incarnation (*arcā*) greatly praised and adored by the Āḻvārs is on the hill called *Veṅkaṭa* (*Tirumalai*). The hill itself, according to Poygai Āḻvār, is as much great and powerful as God Himself in the *arcā* form manifesting supreme power and redemptive mercy. Poygai Āḻvār praises the greatness of the *Veṅkaṭa* hill in the hymn given above.

There are some who look upon *aiśvarya* as the highest end to be attained. Some others consider *kaivalya*, which is self-realization,—spiritual solitude, different from *mokṣa*—as the supreme goal. *Mokṣa* which is God-realization is the highest goal to some others. It may be noted here that *kaivalya* which is spiritual solitude attained through self-realization is inferior to *mokṣa*, and *aiśvarya* is very much inferior to *kaivalya*. Obstacles that stand in the way must be removed for attaining any of these goals. Poygai Āḻvār says that the well-known hill, *Veṅkaṭa* (*Tirumalai*), the abode of the Lord, will put out the fire of evil deeds which give rise to obstacles that prevent the attainment of the goal, whatever it may be—*aiśvarya*, *kaivalya*, or *mokṣa*—desired by those who are in bondage. In the case of *nityasūris*, who are eternally free, the same hill, the Āḻvār says, functions in a different way. It rouses and enlivens their fire (light) of knowledge (*dharma-bhūta-jñāna*). The *Veṅkaṭa* hill is the object of adoration by gods as well as by those who are in bondage. Hence Poygai Āḻvār praises the greatness of the *Tiruveṅkaṭa*, the divine abode.

XIV

Accessibility of God to a Serene Mind

"The mind of those who keep it steady by making it serene and who fully realize through knowledge (their dependence on God) in the right way will, without any effort, find its way to the feet of the Lord, who wears the

garland of the cool basil, in the same way as a calf will easily find its way to its mother."[1] [30]

The mind of a person will be tranquil only when he is free from desire, aversion, and bad conduct, and keeps the senses under control. The tranquillity of the mind is an indication of the preponderance of of the *sattva-guṇa* therein. From the mind which remains steady because of its serenity, knowledge arises. The *Kaṭha Upaniṣad* (I, ii, 24) stresses the importance of the tranquillity of the mind for the purpose of attaining the knowledge of Brahman as follows: "One who has not desisted from bad conduct, whose senses are not under control, whose mind is not concentrated, whose mind is not free from anxiety, cannot attain this Brahman through knowledge." That knowledge arises from the mind predominated by *sattva-guṇa* is stated in the *Bhagavad-gītā* (XIV, 17): "From *sattva* arises knowledge." It is this idea that Poygai Āḻvār brings out in the first two lines of this hymn.

Poygai Āḻvār explains how God is easily accessible to one whose mind is clear, calm, and steady and who knows his relation to God, by giving an example in the last two lines of the hymn. Just as a calf that remains isolated will make its way to its mother in the herd of its own accord without any difficulty, even so the mind will be able to comprehend God without any difficulty, once the disturbing influences of the mind, *viz* oblivion (*laya*), distraction (*vikṣepa*), passion (*kaṣāya*), and satisfaction (*rasāsvāda*) are removed.

XV

God's Concern for the Devotee

"Is it possible to think, even for a moment, of anything else than the feet of the Lord who, holding the conch (whose spirals turn to the right) on the one hand, and supporting the incomparably beautiful discus on the

1. தெளிதாக உள்ளத்தைச் செங்நிறீஇ, ஞானத்து
எளிதாக நன்குணர்வார் சிந்தை—எளிதாகத்
தாய் நாடு கன்றேபோல், தண்துழாயான் அடிக்கே
போய் நாடிக் கொள்ளும் புரிந்து. [30]

other hand, assumed the form of the Lion-man (*Narasiṁha*), and tore the chest of Hiraṇyakaśipu whose colour was like that of fire."[1] [31]

The relation between God and His devotee is reciprocal. Just as a devotee thinks of God all the time uttering His name and praising His greatness and goodness, even so the Lord is very much concerned all the time about the well-being of His devotee. God knows what is good for the devotee, and how He should take care of him at the appropriate time.

The case of Prahlāda is a testimony to the Lord's concern and affection (*vātsalya*) for the devotee. Prahlāda, when challenged by his haughty and cruel father, Hiraṇyakaśipu, told him that God who was adored by him all the time was omnipresent. When Hiraṇyakaśipu questioned Prahlāda whether God was present in a pillar which he spotted out with a view to test the omnipresence of God, the latter replied in the affirmative. In order to prove the truth of Prahlāda's statement, God came out from that pillar in the form of *Narasiṁha* (Man-lion), even though Prahlāda did not pray to God invoking His presence therein, and killed Hiraṇyakaśipu without using any weapon.

God acts on His own without waiting for the prayers and petitions of the devotee. When such is the affection of the Lord for His devotee, how is it possible, asks Poygai Āḻvār, to think of anything else excepting the Lord.

XVI

God-realization and the Inward Eye

"Those who, without controlling the five senses and their objects, embrace the body of women, are those who do not keep the senses contented by knowing Brahman

1. புரியொருகை பற்றி, ஓர் பொன்னுழி ஏந்தி,
அரி உருவம் ஆளுருவம் ஆகி—எரியுருவ
வண்ணத்தான் மார்பிடந்த மாலடியை அல்லால், மற்று
எண்ணத்தான் ஆமோ, இமை. [31]

through the eye of the mind, removing the darkness of ignorance. Such people cannot reach the City of the Lord who has the thousand-hooded snake (*Ādiśeṣa*) as His bed."[1] [32]

It is the very nature of the senses to go outward in search of the objects of enjoyment. The *Kaṭha Upaniṣad* (II, i, 1) speaks of the five senses such as eye, ear, etc., as *parañci khāni* meaning outgoing senses. Though desires seem to be fulfilled when objects to which they are related are attained, they can never be appeased thereby, for they grow by what they feed on. Just as fire cannot be extinguished by adding fuel to it, even so desires can never be removed by satisfying them through the attainment of objects. When a person fulfils a desire, the satisfaction which he enjoys is only temporary. There is once again a want towards the same object whose attainment will give him only a temporary satisfaction. Though paradoxical it may seem, the truth is that desire needs fulfilment which again is followed by desire. And the process has to continue so long as one is overwhelmed by desires. A person who is involved in this process cannot be free from desires and cannot keep his senses under control. Such a person will be sensuous and self-indulgent, caring only for the flesh and things which cater to the flesh.

When the senses are not under control, the mind too is agitated, disturbed, and unsteady. When the mind is not calm and steady, it will not be possible to realize God, the supreme Self. It is through dispassion (*vairāgya*) and discrimination (*viveka*) that one must break the vicious circle of desire leading to fulfilment, and fulfilment being followed by desire which again needs fulfilment. The *Kaṭha Upaniṣad* (I, ii, 24) says: "One who has not desisted from bad conduct, whose senses are not under control, whose mind is not free from anxiety, cannot attain this Self through knowledge." This passage stresses the need for the control of the senses and a calm mind for the purpose of

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1. இமையாத கண்ணுல் இருளகல நோக்கி
அமையாப் பொறிபுலன்கள் ஐந்தும்—நமையாமல்
ஆகத்து அணைப்பார் அணைவரே, ஆயிரவாய்
நாகத்து அணையான் நகர். [32]

God-realization. One who does not undergo this discipline cannot realize God. Poygai Āḻvār conveys the same idea in the hymn given above.

Poygai Āḻvār suggests in the first line of the hymn that Brahman, the supreme reality, can be known, not through the outward visual sense, but only through the "inward eye", *viz* the mind. The *Muṇḍaka Upaniṣad* (III, i, 8) says: "It (the Self) is not comprehended through the eye, nor through speech, nor through the other senses; nor is it attained through austerity or *karma*. Through the favour of the mind which is pure, one can see that indivisible Self by means of meditation." That the ultimate reality can be known only through the mind which is pure and tranquil is stated in the *Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad* (IV, iv, 19): "Through the mind alone (it) is to be realized" (*manasaiva anudraṣṭavyam*). Poygai Āḻvār conveys the Upaniṣadic idea in his own inimitable way in the first line of the hymn given above.

The expression "*ākattu aṇaippār*", which occurs in the third line of the hymn, means those who embrace the body (of women). The word "*aṇaivare*" may be interpreted in the sense of *aṇaivaro*. Mind will be fit enough to know the real nature of the *jīva* as well as that of Brahman, only when it is calm and one-pointed. Knowing one's own nature as a dependent being (*śeṣa*) and that of God as the supreme independent being (*śeṣi*), through the mind which is pure and steady, one must keep the senses contented. On the contrary, one who yields to the senses and leads a life of self-indulgence cannot, the Āḻvār declares, realize God.

The hymn may also be interpreted in another way. The expression "*ākattu aṇaippār*" may be explained to mean "those who think of God in the mind". A man may be bad leading a life which is sensuous and licentious. Nevertheless, because of the spontaneous grace (*nirhetuka-kṛpā*) of God, which functioning on its own takes hold of him, his mind, without any effort on his part, becomes engrossed in God; and so he leads a new life. Such a person who is the beneficiary of the spontaneous grace of God realizes Him.

Another explanation is also possible. When a person has itching sensation in some part of his body, he cannot normally avoid scrat-

ching that part. It is well-known that frequent scratching does not provide any relief to the itching sensation. The senses which go outward towards objects cannot be appeased and controlled by providing objects which they demand. To provide objects for the senses is just like scratching the skin affected by a disease. The word "*namaiyāmal*" which occurs in the second line of the hymn may be understood in the sense of "without scratching", *i.e.* without providing objects to the five senses.

The mind is the "inward eye". It is pure only when it has *sattva-guṇa* predominant in it. The outward eye cannot see anything when it is covered by the two lids. In the same way the inward eye (mind) cannot know God when it is covered by *rajas* and *tamas*, which are its two lids. So the meaning of the hymn is that those persons who control the senses without providing objects to them and who contemplate on God (*ākattu aṇaippār*), having known Him through the *sāttvic* mind which is not overwhelmed by *rajas* and *tamas*, will realize God.

Poygai Āḻvār emphasizes the importance of *jñāna*, *vairāgya*, and *bhakti* as means to God-realization in the hymn mentioned above. When he speaks of *knowing* God through the mind, the emphasis is on *jñāna* or knowledge. The importance of *vairāgya* or dispassion is brought out when he says that the senses should not be provided with the objects of enjoyment. He lays stress on *bhakti* or contemplation when he speaks of keeping the mind engrossed in God.

According to Viśiṣṭādvaita, liberation (*mokṣa*) consists in communion with God by reaching the divine abode called *Vaikuṇṭha*. It is not just intellectual or spiritual awakening. It involves a real attainment of the supreme Being by reaching the celestial City of God—a pilgrimage which one can undertake only when the physical body falls off. This idea, the Āḻvār brings out when he speaks of attaining the City of God who has made the thousand-hooded Ādiśeṣa His bed.

XVII

Godless Mind and Slavery to Rituals

"What is the use of recitation and taking count of it, and the offering of morning and evening prayers

without the mind reflecting on the names of the Lord, who provided on His navel-lotus the abode for the four-faced Brahmā, who revealed to him the *Vedas* to be taught to others, and who is endowed with auspicious qualities?"[1] [33]

Poygai Āḻvār speaks of God as "*paṇpan*", *i.e.* as one who is endowed with auspicious qualities like *sauśīlya* (uprightness), *vātsalya* (affection towards the devotees), etc. The Lord not only provided an abode in His own being to Brahmā, the creator, but also revealed to him the *Vedas*. Such was His affection for Brahmā.

Every deed must be done as an offering to the Lord. Recitation of the names of the Lord and offering of prayers at the stipulated time will be of no use, says the Āḻvār, so long as the mind is not engrossed in the Lord. The orientation of the mind at the time of the performance of these overt acts must also be considered. Deeds must be guided by a God-oriented mind. A person who allows his mind to wander about without thinking about God at the time of the performance of the scripture-ordained deeds is a slave to external rituals. The deeds of a person who is mentally far away from God do not count at all. Rituals done with a godless mind are, indeed, a loss; and one who performs them as a matter of routine without proper mental orientation is a slave to them.

XVIII

The Evil of Egoism

"Is it not for removing the sense of I and mine (of the individual souls) that you, by begging, accepted

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1. நகரம் அருள்புரிந்து நான்முகற்குப் பூமேல்
பகர மறைபயந்த பண்பன்—பெயரினையே
புந்தியால் சிந்தியாது, ஓதி உரு எண்ணும்
அந்தியால் ஆம் பயன் அங்கு என். [33]

(three measures of) ground, lowering your hands which have the lustrous discus and sharp nails by which, causing wound, you tore earlier Hiraṇyakaśipu, who claimed the world as his own ?''[1] [36]

The spiritual aspirant who aims at God-realization should be free from egoism. The sense of "I" and "mine" which are the two forms of egoism arise because of ignorance. The inward Self which is immutable is free from action. It is not the doer or agent of any action. Not knowing its real nature and superimposing the nature of the mind thereon, a person thinks of himself as an agent. Moreover, the inward Self is non-dual. It is not related to anything else. Owing to the false identification of the Self with the mind, the senses, the body, and the external things, a person develops the possessive sense, the sense of "mine"; he speaks of "his" mind, "his" senses, "his" body, "his" wealth, and so on. Mind, senses, body, etc., are not-Self. Lacking discrimination between the Self and the not-Self, a person develops the nominative and the possessive aspects of egoism. A spiritual aspirant must be free from egoism. One who is egoistic is demonaic; and one who is free from it is divine. Lord Kṛṣṇa says in the *Gītā* (XVI, 6) that there are two kinds of beings, the divine and the demonaic. He observes (XVI, 5): "The divine nature is deemed for liberation and the demonaic, for bondage..."

The entire universe belongs to God, for He is the source, support, and the controller of it. While God is the indwelling Self (*śarīrin*), the entire universe is His body (*śarīra*); and so the latter belongs to Him. Nothing in the world belongs to us, the individual souls. So the spiritual aspirants who care for liberation should lead a life of detachment. This idea is conveyed in the opening *mantra* of the *Īśa Upaniṣad* which says: "All this, whatever moves in this moving

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1. முரணை வலி தொலைதற்கு ஆம் என்றே முன்னம்
தரணி தனதாகத் தானே—இரணியனைப்
புண்ணிரந்த வள் உகிரால் பொன்னழிக் கையால் நீ
மண்ணிரந்து கொண்ட வகை. [36]

world, is enveloped by God. So find your enjoyment in renunciation; do not covet what belongs to others."

In the hymn stated above, Poygai Āḻvār emphasizes the need for overcoming the sense of "I" and "mine" by calling attention to the case of Mahābali, and the way in which the Lord, incarnating as *Vāmana*, dealt with him. Mahābali was full of egoism. He thought of himself as the lord of the entire universe and claimed that it belonged to him, even though God, being the supreme Lord of the universe, is its owner. It is with a view to remove his egoism and thereby to teach a lesson to him as well as to others that God incarnated as *Vāmana* and begged of him three feet of ground, even though the entire world is His.

Though both Hiraṇyakaśipu and Mahābali were egoistic, the Lord dealt with them differently. While the former hated the Lord and treated Him as an inveterate enemy, the latter did not.

XIX

Utterance of the Name of the Lord

"O, my mind! From this day on, always contemplate on what is spoken about the Lord, who has the beautiful discus in His hand, even though what is uttered is only for the sake of utterance (and not out of love of God). In that case, even if you do wrong as big as a mountain, He will view it as good."[1] [41]

If a devotee thinks of the Lord and utters His name with love, it is the best. What is the next best thing? Poygai Āḻvār says that God should be the object of one's thought and utterance, even if genuine love for God is wanting. This too, assures the Āḻvār, will be fruitful,

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1. குன்று அனைய குற்றம் செய்யினும் குணங்கொள்ளும்
இன்று முதலாக என் நெஞ்சே—என்றும்
புறன் உரையே ஆயினும் பொன்னழிக் கையான்
திறன் உரையே சிந்தித்து இரு. [41]

thanks to the goodness of the Lord. It does not matter whether the utterance of the name of the Lord is out of genuine love towards Him or not. It is better to think and speak of Him than to think and speak of anything else. God is so good as to view favourably every thought and utterance even though it is wanting in devotion and love.

XX

Fruits of Worship

"The devotees by their very nature worship, with flower and water, the feet of the Lord who wears the garland of basil grown luxuriantly in the high-land. Consequently, their minds are free from evil. Sins which cannot be wiped out cannot reach them. Love which is wealth will come of its own accord."[1] [43]

In this hymn, Poygai Āḻvār refers to the fruits that accrue to the devotees who worship the Lord disinterestedly without any concern with the fruits of their action.

XXI

Divine Accessibility Through Many Forms

"In whatever form the devotee conjures up God who has the discus in His hand, the same form He assumes. Further, whatever name the devotee gives Him, the same name He accepts. With whatever qualities the devotee always thinks of Him, with the same qualities He remains."[2] [44]

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1. மனம் மாசு தீரும், அருவினையும் சாரா,
தனமாய தானே கைகூடும்—புனமேய
பூந்துழாயான் அடிக்கே போதொடு நீர்சேந்தி,
தாம் தொழாநிற்பர் தமர். [43]

2. தமர் உகந்தது எவ்வுருவம் அவ்வுருவம் தானே,
தமர் உகந்தது எப்பேர் மற்றப்பேர்—தமர் உகந்து
எவ்வண்ணம் சிந்தித்து இமையாது இருப்பரே
அவ்வண்ணம் ஆழியான் ஆம். [44]

The supreme Being manifests itself in different forms and as endowed with different names and qualities, as thought of by the devotees. Lord Kṛṣṇa declares in the *Bhagavad-gītā* (IV, 4): "Howsoever men approach me, even so do I reward them..." It is this idea that is brought out by Poygai Āḻvār in the hymn given above. Supremacy and easy accessibility are the two complementary aspects of God. God is not only supreme, but is easily accessible to the devotees as well. As the devotees ascend towards God, God descends towards them, assuming the form, name, and qualities as thought of by them.

The Āḻvār stresses the greatness and value of *arcāvatāra* in this hymn.

XXII

Greatness of Bhakti

"Even gods do not know the auspicious qualities of the Lord. But, O good mind! we (because of the divine grace) know the Lord who, making marks by His foot, counted the long ten heads of the wicked demon, Rāvaṇa, who stood worshipping at the feet of Brahmā, of great austerity, who has his abode at the navel-lotus of the Lord."[1] [45]

In this hymn, Poygai Āḻvār lays emphasis on the greatness of *bhakti* which enables the devotees to attain God-realization. What is not possible even for gods becomes possible for the devotees of the Lord.

The episode that is mentioned in this hymn by Poygai Āḻvār is also stated by Peyāḻvār in hymn (77) in the *Third Tiruvantādi*. Once, Rāvaṇa, without revealing his identity, went to Brahmā and asked a

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1. ஆமே அமரர்க்கு அறிய, அது நிற்க
நாமே அறிகிற்போம், நல் நெஞ்சே—பூ மேய
மா தவத்தோன் தாள் பணிந்த வாளரக்கன் நீண்முடியை
பாதமத்தால் எண்ணினான் பண்பு. [45]

boon. The Lord, assuming the form of a child, lay on the lap of Brahmā and indicated to him by making marks through His foot that the person seeking boon from him was no other than the wicked Rāvaṇa with ten heads.

XXIII

The Means to Release

"By withdrawing the five rutting elephants, *viz* the senses, from the water and by efficiently controlling them without allowing them to roam about, those who know Him through true knowledge (or *bhakti*) which is very subtle will realize the feet of the Lord who, once upon a time, protected the Gajendra."[1] [47]

Poygai Āḻvār explains the means to liberation in this hymn.

The five senses which are compared to the rutting elephants must first of all be controlled, by withdrawing them from the external objects. They must be turned towards God. The practice of *niṣkāma-karma* helps the spiritual aspirant not only to be God-oriented, but also leads to his purification of the mind (*citta-śuddhi*). Right knowledge will arise only in a mind which is predominated with *sattva-guṇa*. The *Bhagavad-gītā* (XIV, 17) says, "From *sattva* arises knowledge" (*sattvāt sañjāyate jñānam*). This right knowledge of the Supreme is characterized as subtle, because the supreme Being is subtle. So Brahman-realization which is release can be attained, says Poygai Āḻvār, only through the right knowledge. The word "*jñānam*" used by the Āḻvār in the third line of the hymn is explained as *bhakti* in the Viśiṣṭādvaita tradition. According to Viśiṣṭādvaita, knowledge, when deepened through contemplation, becomes *bhakti*. On this interpreta-

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1. வாரி சுருக்கி மதக்களிறு ஐந்தினையும்
சேரி திரியாமல் செம்நிறீஇ—கூரிய
மெய்ஞ்ஞானத்தால் உணர்வார் காண்பரே, மேலொருநாள்
கைந்நாகம் காத்தான் கழல். [47]

tion, a devotee through *bhakti* attains Brahman-realization which is release.

In the last line of the hymn, reference is made to the elephant, Gajendra, which was rescued by the Lord from the clutches of the crocodile when it got into a pond to pluck a flower for worshipping the Lord.

XXIV

Efficacy of Bhakti

"By controlling the five senses which cannot be easily restrained and by worshipping with the choicest flowers in hand and with loving devotion, it is easy to realize the Lord who, with his munificent hand, accepted the pouring of water by Mahābali, who was great and who regularly gave gifts to others."[1] [50]

Poygai Āḻvār brings out the efficacy of *bhakti* as the means to God-realization. God-realization, says the Āḻvār, is vouched for those who worship God with *bhakti*, giving up attachment to the objects of the world.

The senses by their very nature are out-going; and they have to be controlled by the mind. Controlling the mind is no doubt difficult. Arjuna gives expression to this difficulty when he says: "The mind verily, is, O Kṛṣṇa, restless, turbulent, strong, and obstinate. Thereof the restraint I deem quite as difficult as that of the wind." (*Gītā*, VI, 34) However, the mind can be controlled by practice (*abhyāsa*) and dispassion (*vairāgya*). Practice consists in constantly keeping the idea of God in the mind. Dispassion is giving up the objects of pleasure through constant perception of evil in them. Through *abhyāsa* and

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1. அரிய புலன் ஐந்து அடக்கி, ஆய் மலர்கொண்டு, ஆர்வம்
புரிய பரிசினால் புல்கில்—பெரியவனாய்
மாற்றாது வீற்றிருந்த மாவலிபால் வண்கை நீர்
ஏற்றானைக் காண்பது எளிது. [50]

vairāgya, the thought-stream of the mind which is object-oriented can be canalized towards God. The need for *abhyāsa* and *vairāgya* is stressed by Lord Kṛṣṇa for the purpose of controlling the mind as follows: "Doubtless, O mighty-armed, the mind is hard to restrain and restless, but by practice, O son of Kunti, and by dispassion it may be controlled." (*Gītā*, VI, 35) A devotee who resorts to *bhakti* after controlling the mind attains God-realization.

In the last two lines of the hymn, Poygai Āḻvār refers to the Lord's incarnation as *Vāmana* and His accepting the offering of water poured by Mahābali in token of the gift of three measures of ground by the latter. Mahābali was great as a donor. Indeed, he is ranked first among the donors. Though he knew that the short-statured *Vāmana* was no other than the Lord who came to subjucate him, he did not hesitate to gift three measures of ground which Vāmana begged of him. Nor did he go back from his word when he saw *Vāmana* assuming the cosmic form and started measuring the ground. Thus Mahābali was great as a donor.

XXV

Beyond Speech and Mind

"Chattering the names of the Lord apart, who can truly know our supreme Being? Be it so. Brahmā, in spite of having his abode so closely in the fragrant navel-lotus of the Lord, is not able to know the lotus feet of the Lord."[1] [56]

Brahman, the supreme Being, is not an object of knowledge; and so it cannot be known in the way in which empirical things are known. It cannot be comprehended by the mind which is insentient. The

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1. பேரே வரப் பிதற்றல் அல்லால், எம் பெம்மானை
ஆரே அறிவார், அது நிற்க—நேரே
கடிக் கமலத்து உள்ளிருந்தும் காண்கிலான் கண்ணன்
அடிக் கமலம் தன்னை அயன். [56]

insentient mind by itself cannot reveal anything. If we know the things of the world through the mind, it is because of the light of consciousness reflected in the mind. Brahman which is no other than the inward Self of the individual is of the nature of consciousness; and so it cannot be known through the insentient mind. Further, whatever is known is material (*jaḍa*), something other than consciousness. If Brahman too were to be known, it should be reduced to the status of a material thing; it would then cease to be of the nature of consciousness. Again, Brahman is self-luminous. While it reveals other things, it is not known through anything else. A text of the *Kaṭha Upaniṣad* (II, ii, 15) says: "He shining, all these shine; through His lustre, all these are variously illumined." Brahman, the non-dual reality, which is immutable and which is devoid of qualities, cannot be designated by words. Through words we can denote an object which has a genus (*jāti*), or a quality (*guṇa*), or an act (*karma*), or relation (*sambandha*). But Brahman has none of these. Brahman does not belong to a class. That is why it cannot be designated even by the word "*sat*". Further, Brahman is *nirguṇa*. If there are qualities in Brahman, it could be denoted by a word such as white, black, etc. implying a quality. Again, Brahman is immutable; and so it cannot be denoted by a word implying an act. Since it is one and non-dual, there is nothing else to which it is related. So it cannot be referred to by words which imply relation. It means that Brahman, the ultimate reality, cannot be denoted by words. That Brahman is beyond speech and mind is stated in the *Taittirīya Upaniṣad* (II, iv, 1): "Whence all words return, unable to reach it (Brahman), along with the mind."

What, then, is the means to the realization of Brahman? Poygai Āḻvār assures us that Brahman which is beyond speech and thought can nevertheless be realized through uttering the names of the Lord. Like the practice of *niṣkāma-karma*, the utterance of the names of God leads to the purification of the mind. When the mind is purified, a person is competent to understand the teaching of Scripture. And Scripture conveys the knowledge of Brahman negatively by stating what Brahman is not, by removing all wrong notions caused by *avidyā*, by negating all specifications and qualities falsely superimposed on Brahman due to *avidyā*. One may or may not know the significance of the names of the

Lord. The mere utterance of the names, even without knowing their significance, will be fruitful.

One cannot claim that one knows a thing merely on the score of proximity to it. *Brahmā*, the creator, who is so close to the Lord, does not know, says Poygai Āḻvār, even the lotus feet of the Lord who is infinite. How then can others who are less competent know Him?

A spiritual aspirant has to prepare himself for Brahman-realization through the practice of *karma* and *bhakti*. When he thus makes himself competent, he can be the beneficiary of the grace of God when it falls on him. To him He reveals, whom He chooses.

XXVI

Overcoming Sins Through Association with God

" I was afraid of the atrocious sins which sat tight on me. Thus frightened and with the desire to attain salvation, I worshipped you with the delightful and excellent garland of these hymns for reaching your sacred feet, and recited the *mantra*, *'namo nārāyaṇāya'*."[1] [57]

In this hymn, Poygai Āḻvār says that association with the Lord through worshipping Him with flowers and garlands, and through reciting *aṣṭākṣara* helps a devotee to overcome his sins. Resorting to these, the Āḻvār attained salvation. He gives this information for the benefit of those who are desirous of salvation.

The expression " *nayaninṟa nanmālai* " means the delightful and beautiful garland. In the context, it may be interpreted to mean " the beautiful garland of hymns constituting Scripture ". The hymns of the Āḻvār constitute Scripture. Inasmuch as they convey the central teachings of the Upaniṣads which are *Vedānta*, they are also called

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1. அயல் நின்ற வல்வினையை அஞ்சினேன், அஞ்சி
உய நின் திருவடியே சேர்வான்—நயநின்ற
நன்மாலை கொண்டு நமோநாரணா என்னும்
சொன்மாலை கற்றேன் தொழுது. [57]

Vedānta. Scripture gives information about five things (*artha-pañcaka*): (1) the nature of the supreme Being, (2) the nature of the individual soul, (3) the means to the attainment of the supreme Being, (4) the *puruṣārtha* which is to be attained, and (5) the obstacles to be removed. Since Poygai Āḻvār's *Tiruvantādi*, like the hymns of the other Āḻvars, deals with all these five things, it is sacred Scripture.

"*Om namo nārāyaṇāya*" is the *aṣṭākṣara-mantra*.

XXVII

A Pure Mind and a Competent Teacher

"O mind! Let us worship with flower and incense in the hand, and attain salvation. Arise. May you live long. Learning the sacred names without fault is for the purpose of worshipping the feet of the Lord with our hands. There is no time for delay. Hasten to attain Him."[1] [58]

The work of the mind counts very much in the life of a spiritual aspirant. It is through the mind that the out-going senses have to be controlled. Again, through the mind alone which is pure, the supreme Being can be known. The *Kaṭha Upaniṣad* (II, i, 11) says: "This (Brahman) is to be attained through the mind." Poygai Āḻvār feels happy that his mind, being fit for the role it has to play, co-operates with him in his quest of perfection. He conveys his appreciation and good-will to the mind by saying: "May you live long!"

One has to study Scripture under the guidance of a competent teacher. The study of Scripture under the guidance of a teacher is known as *śravaṇa*. Both the teacher and Scripture help to purify the

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1. தொழுது மலர்கொண்டு தூபம் கையேந்தி
எழுதும், எழு, வாழி நெஞ்சே—பழுதின்றி
மந்திரங்கள் கற்பனவும் மாலடியே கைதொழுவான்,
அந்தரம் ஒன்று இல்லை, அடை. [58]

mind of a spiritual aspirant. In the course of his commentary on the text of the *Kaṭha Upaniṣad* (II, i, 11) quoted above, Śaṅkara says that "Brahman which is homogeneous is to be attained as identical with the Self, there being nothing else existing, through the mind, which is purified by the teacher and Scripture." There are many *śruti* texts which stress the importance of a teacher for a spiritual aspirant. The *Chāndogya Upaniṣad* (VI, xiv, 2) says: "A person having a teacher can know Brahman." The same *Upaniṣad* says in another context (IV, ix, 3), "Knowledge received from a teacher alone helps one to attain the end." One has to know the teaching about God without fault; and what is learnt from a competent teacher alone will be without fault. The discipline called *śravaṇa* must be followed by rational thinking (*manana*) and repeated contemplation (*nididhyāsana*).

XXVIII

The Path of Prapatti

"If the powerful deeds that have already taken possession of us, the afflictions (which follow them), disease and sins, all of which fetter the *jīva*, are to be rooted out along with their latent impressions, the means thereto is surrender to the Lord who incarnating as Rāma held the bow in His beautiful hand in such a way as to destroy once upon a time the strength of Rāvaṇa who held Sītā, having slender waist, a captive in Laṅkā."[1] [59]

In this hymn Poygai Āḻvār brings out the significance of *prapatti* which is a direct and independent path to release.

The *jīva*, *i.e.* the individual soul, by its very nature is pure; and it is of the nature of knowledge and bliss. Since its empirical existence

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1. அடைந்த வல்வினையோடு அல்லல் நோய் பாவம்
மிடைந்தவை மீண்டு ஒழிய வேண்டில்—நுடங்கிடையை
முன் இலங்கை வைத்தான் முரண் அழிய முன்னொருநாள்
தன் வில் அம் கை வைத்தான் சரண். [59]

qua jīva is beginningless (*anādi*), it is not possible to ascertain the beginning of its suffering. As *jīva*, it is subject to the limitation of *avidyā*, which is also beginningless (*anādi*). Because of *avidyā*, there arises desire; desire leads to deeds, good as well as bad; and because of deeds, merit and demerit, *i.e. puṇya* and *pāpa*, accrue to the *jīva*; and these in their turn lead to further deeds, good and bad. Thus, the empirical existence of the *jīva* involving the cycle of births and deaths is full of suffering.

Poygai Āḻvār in the first two lines of the hymn refers to the suffering of the *jīva* in its empirical existence. There are three kinds *karma*—*sañcita, prārabdha,* and *āgāmi. Sañcita* refers to the accumulated *karma*-in-store which stands to the credit of the *jīva* in its empirical existence. *Āgāmi* is *karma*-yet-to-come. *Prārabdha* is *karma*-in-action. At the appropriate time, a particular *karma* starts functioning, giving rise to various results—the present bodily existence of a *jīva* and the experience of pleasure and pain. The accumulated demerit (*pāpa*) begins to fructify causing mental afflictions, bodily disease, and so on. In the same way, the enjoyment of pleasure is due to merit *(puṇya*). The pleasure which the *jīva* experiences in its empirical condition is ephemeral and finite. Since it does not give the *jīva* abiding satisfaction, it too becomes a source of pain. So both pleasure and pain which a *jīva* experiences in its empirical condition have to be overcome for attaining release.

In the last two lines of the hymn, Poygai Āḻvār refers to God's incarnation as Rāma, the abduction of Sītā by Rāvaṇa, and finally the destruction of Rāvaṇa by Rāma. He says that, for the purpose of overcoming the suffering of bondage and attaining salvation, one must surrender to the Lord, who incarnated as Rāma.

According to Viśiṣṭādvaita, *prapatti* is an alternative path to release. The practice of *karma-yoga* and *jñāna-yoga,* according to Viśiṣṭādvaita, paves the way for *bhakti-yoga* which in its turn leads to release. Those who are not competent to tread the path of *bhakti* may resort to *prapatti*, the path of surrender. Just as the practice of *bhakti* leads to release, even so the pursuit of *prapatti* leads to release. As in the case of *bhakti*, here also faith in the saving grace of the Lord is necessary on the part

of the spiritual aspirant. It may be stated here that the *Tenkalai* school of Śrīvaiṣṇavism does not consider *prapatti* as *sādhyopāya*. Just as it does not consider *bhakti* as a *yoga* or discipline to be accomplished by the individual, even so it does not treat *prapatti* as a *yoga* to be accomplished by the individual. A spiritual aspirant who resorts to *prapatti* is called a *prapanna*. A *prapanna* is one who is completely free from egoism, who has the feeling of unworthiness and helplessness to do anything — to follow the path of *karma*, or *jñāna*, or *bhakti* — and who totally and unreservedly surrenders to the Lord. Lord Kṛṣṇa sets forth the doctrine of *prapatti* in the *Bhagavad-gītā* (XVIII, 66) as follows: "Renouncing all dharmas, seek me as your sole refuge. I will liberate you from all sins. Do not grieve." The *Tenkalai* school holds the view that divine grace which is spontaneous does not operate in response to the merit of the individual. Since grace is spontaneous and not responsive, it believes in *nirhetuka-kṛpā*. It makes no sense to speak of the merit of the individual in the context of divine grace.

XXIX

God—The Material and Efficient Cause

"The world, the state of dissolution of the world, the black ocean full of waves and of beautiful colour, the mountains, the red fire, the air, and the ether that are in the world—all these are the creations of the Lord, Lakṣmī-Nārāyaṇa, through His volition."[1] [61]

Brahman, being the source of the entire world, is its material cause (*upādāna-kāraṇa*). One may think that there must be, besides Brahman, some other entity which is the efficient cause (*nimitta-kāraṇa*) of the world, for we find in our experience that the efficient cause is different from the material cause. Clay is the material cause of pot;

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1. உலகும், உலகிறந்த ஊழியும், ஒண்கேழ்
விலகு கருங்கடலும், வெற்பும்—உலகினில்
செந்தியும், மாருதமும், வானும், திருமால் தன்
புந்தியால் ஆய புணர்ப்பு. [61]

and potter is its efficient cause. Both of them which are necessary for the production of a thing are different from each other. If so, there must be, one may think, an efficient cause different from Brahman which is the material cause. But this is not true in the case of Brahman. Brahman is both the material and the efficient cause rolled into one. Consider, for example, the *Chāndogya* text (VI, ii, 1) which says: "In the beginning there was Being alone, one only without a second." It is from Being (*sat*), *i.e.* Brahman, that everything comes into existence; and so Brahman is the material cause. Since it is without a second (*advitīyam*), it is also the efficient cause of the world. The same *Upaniṣad* goes on to say in the sequel: "It thought: may I become many, may I grow forth..." The capacity to think on the part of Being (Brahman) shows that it is not an inert principle, but something conscious or intelligent and that it is, therefore, the efficient cause of the world as well. There are also other Upaniṣadic texts which convey this idea. In the hymn given above, Poygai Āḻvār states the same idea on the basis of his own authentic experience.

The world to which Poygai Āḻvār refers at the commencement of the hymn implies the state of creation (*sṛṣṭi*). Then reference is made by him to the dissolution of the world (*pralaya*). The maintenance (*sthiti*) of the world, though not explicitly stated, is implied in the context. It means that God is not only the source and support of the world, but also is that into which the world is finally dissolved. Compare this with the *Taittirīya* text (III, i, 1) which says: "Desire to know that from which all these beings take birth, that by which they live after being born, that towards which they move and into which they merge. That is Brahman."

In the second and third lines of the hymn, Poygai Āḻvār refers to the objects created by God. The ocean and the mountains mentioned by the Āḻvār suggest the two elements, *viz* water and earth. The remaining three elements, *viz* fire, air, and ether, are also mentioned by him. All the objects of the world are constituted by these five elements. The elements which come into existence from Brahman-Ātman and also their sequence are stated in the *Taittirīya Upaniṣad* (II, i, 1) as follows: "From that Brahman which is the Self, was produced ether. From ether emerged air. From air was born fire. From fire was

created water. From water sprang up earth." Towards the close of the third line and in the last line of the hymn, the Āḻvār says that the things of the world constituted by the five elements have come out of God, Lakṣmī-Nārāyaṇa, and that God Himself is the efficient cause of the world. The expression "*tirumāl tan puntiyāl āya puṇarppu*" used by the Āḻvār can be construed in two ways as "*tirumāl tannāl āya puṇarppu*" and "*tirumāl tan puntiyāl āya puṇarppu*". While the former conveys the idea that creation has proceeded from God, the material cause, the latter states that God is the efficient cause of the world. Poygai Āḻvār in the hymn given above thus brings out the idea that God is both the material and efficient cause (*abhinna-nimittopādāna-kāraṇa*) of the world.

XXX

Total Absorption in God

"My hands will not worship anyone but the Lord. My two ears will remain hearing the pleasant names of the Lord who is related to me. Everyday my tongue will be speaking about the feet of the Lord who wears the sounding anklets and who has the mighty Ādiśeṣa as His bed. I will not shamelessly pursue the objects of pleasure."[1] [63]

When his senses are oriented towards the Lord, who is the *puruṣārtha* to be attained, how is it possible for him, asks Poygai Āḻvār, to run after the sensuous objects of pleasure? The ideal that is suggested here by the Āḻvār for the guidance of the spiritual aspirant is total absorption in the Lord.

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1. தோள் அவனையல்லால் தொழா, என் செவி இரண்டும்
கேள் அவனது இன்மொழியே கேட்டிருக்கும்—நா நாளும்
கோள் நாகணையான் குரைகழலே கூறுவதே,
நாணமை நள்ளேன் நயம். [63]

XXXI

Vaiṣṇavite Code of Conduct

"I will not covet the objects of others. With the ignoble I will not make friends. With others excepting the noble, I will not move. Excepting the Lord of Śrī I will not worship anyone as god. (Because of all these) I will not feel elated. If so, how can further *karma* accrue to me?"[1] [64]

Poygai Āḻvār sets forth in this hymn the Vaiṣṇavite code of conduct.

In the first half of the first line of the hymn, Poygai Āḻvār says that he will not covet the property of someone else. Here is a code of conduct for every one. But there is something more than this which Poygai Āḻvār really wants to convey here. His words contain a deeper sense of great philosophical significance from the Viśiṣṭādvaita point of view. The supreme Lord who is the support and controller of the entire universe is also its owner. So the things of the world belong to Him. The imperishable self (*cit*), which is superior to other things and highly valuable, also belongs to the Lord. It exists for His sake. God is the whole of which it is a part. He is the soul of which it is the body. To claim as one's own any of the things of the world, or even the self, is wrong, according to Poygai Āḻvār.

Another interpretation also is possible. A spiritual aspirant must have the discrimination between the eternal and the ephemeral (*nityā-nitya-vastu-viveka*). The supreme Being alone, called Brahman or Ātman, is eternal; all other things are not eternal. A devotee will not long for the things of others which are transient. If he does, it will mean

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1. நயவேன் பிறர்பொருளை, நள்ளேன் கீழாரோடு,
உயவேன் உயர்ந்தவரோடு அல்லால்—வியவேன்,
திருமாலே அல்லது தெய்வமென்று ஏத்தேன்,
வரும் ஆறு என், என் மேல் வினை. [64]

that he lacks the basic qualification to be fulfilled by a spiritual aspirant.

Poygai Āḻvār classifies people into two categories—the noble and the ignoble. A spiritual aspirant must seek the company of the noble and avoid that of the ignoble.

To Poygai Āḻvār, Śriyaḥpati is the personal god (*iṣṭa-devatā*). In view of his personal preference of the Lord of Śrī as his *iṣṭa-devatā*, he will not, says the Āḻvār, worship any other god.

Further, a spiritual aspirant should not feel elated on any account.

The work of *prārabdha-karma* which has already started functioning cannot be avoided by anyone. But one can avoid the accumulation of further *karma* by adhering to the code of conduct given by the Āḻvār. Coveting another person's property, association with bad people, avoiding the company of the good, elation which will lead to egoism, and not worshipping one's *iṣṭa-devatā*—these will result in the accumulation of further *karma*. A Vaiṣṇavite is one who does not fall a victim to these evils.

XXXII

Benefit of the Worship of God

"Those who worship the Lord whose colour is dark, whose eyes are red, who has thousand names, who is far away, and who is difficult even to be thought of, will not be afflicted by merit and demerit. They will not (once again) get into the painful bondage of hell. They will not go astray even in little things."[1] [65]

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1. வினையால் அடர்ப்படார், வெங்கரகில் சேரார்,
திணையேனும் தீக்கதிக்கண் செல்லார்—நினைதற்கு
அரியானைச் சேயானை ஆயிரம்பேர் செங்கட்
கரியானைக் கைதொழுதக் கால். [65]

In this hymn Poygai Āḻvār states the benefit that accrues to one who worships God.

The thousand names of God are not exhaustive. Thousand names are mentioned only in a representative way.

God is far away to the ignorant; but He is very near to the men of knowledge. This idea is conveyed by the *Īśāvāsya Upaniṣad* (5) which says: "That (Brahman) is far off. That is very near..." He cannot be thought of by the mind; nor can He be designated by words, because He is not an empirical entity.

XXXIII

The Purport of Scripture

"The object which the spiritual aspirants, waking up in the early morning, think of, and which the learned Vedāntins wish to realize is the feet of the Lord who lies down in the milky ocean with the incomparable discus in His hand. What is heard and reflected upon is the name of the Lord whose body is like that of the vast ocean."[1] [66]

Poygai Āḻvār says in this hymn that a spiritual aspirant whose mind is purified resorts to the threefold discipline of *śravaṇa, manana,* and *nididhyāsana,* which is intended to help him attain Brahman-realization.

The *Veda* consists of two parts—the ritual-part (*karma-kāṇḍa*) and the knowledge-part (*jñāna-kāṇḍa*). The Upaniṣads which form the concluding portion of the *Veda* are known as *Vedānta.* They form the knowledge-part of the *Veda,* and purport to teach Brahman, the supreme Being.

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1. காலே எழுந்து உலகம் கற்பனவும், கற்றுணர்ந்த
மேலைத் தலைமறையோர் வேட்பனவும்—வேலைக்கண்
ஓர் ஆழியான் அடியே, ஓதுவதும் ஓர்ப்பனவும்
பேர் ஆழி கொண்டான் பெயர். [66]

Spiritual aspirants who are qualified to study the Upaniṣads study them in the early morning, a time congenial for study and reflection, under the guidance of competent teachers. They also rationally reflect on what they study. Guided study (*śravaṇa*) and rational reflection (*manana*) must be followed by repeated contemplation (*nididhyāsana*). Brahman can be realized through the discipline of *śravaṇa, manana* and *nididhyāsana.* When Yajñavalkya tells Maitreyī in the *Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad* (II, iv, 5) : " The Self, my dear Maitreyī, should be heard of, reflected on, and meditated upon," he calls attention to this threefold discipline.

XXXIV

God-oriented Knowledge

" Only towards the turbulent ocean flows the river. Only towards the rising sun the beautiful lotus turns. Only towards the god of death moves the vital principle. Knowledge comprehends only the Lord of Lakṣmī who is seated on the beautiful lotus flower."[1] [67]

Knowledge worth the name has God for its object. Just as it is natural for the rivers to flow towards the ocean, for the lotus to turn towards the sun, for the vital principle to perish, even so, says Poygai Āḻvār, knowledge by its very nature is related to God. That is why a text of the *Viṣṇupurāṇa* (I, xix, 41) says that that by which the supreme Being which is pure, which is the highest, which is free from imperfection and which is one, is known is knowledge, and that all else is ignorance.

XXXV

Any Mode of Worship Is Good

"Worship the Lord of Śrī, while there is enough strength to utter His name. Worship Him while there is

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1. பெயரும் கருங்கடலே நோக்கும் ஆறு, ஒண்பூ
உயரும் கதிரவனே நோக்கும்—உயிரும்
தருமனையே நோக்கும், ஒண் தாமரையாள் கேள்வன்
ஒருவனையே நோக்கும் உணர்வு. [67]

the physical body, which may fall off (at any time). It will do good if you worship Him by offering a garland of flowers with lovely petals, or by *yajña*, or by deeds (such as prostration), or by uttering *mantra*, or even by uttering His name."[1] [70]

In this hymn Poygai Āḻvār conveys the idea that worship of God, whatever be the mode of worship, is conducive to the attainment of God-realization.

For the practice of several kinds of worship such as offering prostration, visiting temples, performance of *yajña*, etc., the body must be fit. With a decrepit body one cannot practise these modes of worship. Similarly, recitation of *mantra*, uttering the names of the Lord, etc. will be possible only when a devotee is strong enough physically as well as mentally. Taking advantage of the fitness of the body and the soundness of the mind, a devotee, says Poygai Āḻvār, must worship God, whatever be the mode of worship. The body, which can be compared to lightning, may disappear at any time. Even if it continues to exist, it may sometimes be totally useless for the purpose of worship. So a devotee has to take advantage of the sound condition of both the body and the mind, and worship the Lord.

Poygai Āḻvār refers to different kinds of worship in the last two lines of the hymn. One may worship God, offering a garland of flowers. Or, one may perform *nitya* and *naimittika* karmas, *i.e.* karmas which are obligatory and occasional, as well as other yajñas. Worship of this type requires *mantra* as well as deeds. Or, one may worship God by means of prostration which does not require any *mantra*. If the body is not fit enough for any deed, then one may worship God by reciting the sacred *aṣṭākṣara-mantra*. If even this is not possible, one may without any difficulty utter the names of the Lord, as this does not require any qualification or initiation as in the case of learning and

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1. சொல்லுந் தகையும் தொழுமின், விழும் உடம்பு
செல்லுந் தகையும் திருமாலே—நல்லிதழ்த்
தாமத்தால் வேள்வியால் தந்திரத்தால் மந்திரத்தால்
நாமத்தால் ஏத்துதிரேல் நன்று. [70]

reciting a *mantra*. One does not take bath elsewhere for the purpose of purifying the body before taking bath in the Ganges. Similarly, one does not require any preparation or qualification for uttering the names of the Lord.

XXXVI

Lesser Values and Love of God

"O my mind, deep-like ocean ! Even though disease and old age have been completely overcome (and thereby *kaivalya* has been attained), and even though lordship over the entire universe lasting through the four *yugas* has been achieved, do not give up love for the Lord who has the discus ready for destroying the evil. I beseech you."[1] [71]

Poygai Āḻvar emphasizes in this hymn that union with God is the highest *puruṣārtha* which a devotee should aim at, and that puruṣārthas such as *kaivalya*, *aiśvarya*, etc. are lower values to be shunned by him.

What is desired by a person is called *puruṣārtha*. There are many *puruṣārthas*, *i.e.* objects or values desired by man. Wealth, pleasure, etc. are *puruṣārthas*. A spiritual aspirant may aim at *kaivalya* which is a state of spiritual solitude and self-realization, by overcoming disease and old age. But *kaivalya*, according to Viśiṣṭādvaita, is a value inferior to *mokṣa* or God-realization. While the former is finite (*alpa*), the latter is infinite (*bhūman*). A spiritual aspirant may aim at the lordship of the entire universe for as many as four yugas, by attaining the status of *Brahmā*. But this *puruṣārtha*, though lasting for a very long period, is impermanent (*asthira*), whereas *mokṣa* is permanent (*sthira*). Poygai Āḻvār remarks that, even if one can achieve these

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1. நன்று பிணி மூப்புக் கையகற்றி, நான்கு ஊழி
நின்று நிலம் முழுதும் ஆண்டாலும்—என்றும்
விடல், ஆழி நெஞ்சமே, வேண்டினேன் கண்டாய்
அடல் ஆழி கொண்டான் மாட்டு அன்பு. [71]

puruṣārthas, one should not give up devotion and love to the Lord, who is armed with the discus. *Mokṣa* is the highest value which one can attain through the love of God. It may even be said that love of God itself is the highest value which a spiritual aspirant should pursue.

XXXVII

God-oriented Senses

"The mind filled with love says, 'Go to the Lord who has the discus.' The tongue says, 'Praise His strong and beautiful shoulders.' The visual sense says, 'See the Lord who transcends the beginningless time (without noting our faults).' The auditory sense says, 'Listen to the glory of the Lord who wears the garland of pearls as an ornament.'"[1] [72]

This hymn shows how the senses of an ideal devotee are oriented towards God.

In the previous hymn, Poygai Āḻvār appealed to the mind not to forget the Lord on any account. The mind and the senses which are already absorbed in the Lord are portrayed here as playing the role of a teacher, and advising the Āḻvār as to what he should do.

XXXVIII

God—the Indwelling Self

"O my mind! Speak well or ill of the Lord who wears the beautiful basil garland. Reject Him or respect Him. He is the indwelling Self of the ocean full of water all the time and also of the mountain, of the pervasive *ākāśa* and the air, of the body and the soul."[1] [73]

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1. அன்பு ஆழியானே அணுகு என்னும், நா அவன் தன்
பண்பு ஆழித் தோள் பரவி ஏத்து என்னும்—முன்பு ஊழி
காணுனைக் காண் என்னும் கண், செவி கேள் என்னும்
பூண் ஆரம் பூண்டான் புகழ். [72]

2. புகழ்வாய் பழிப்பாய் நீ பூந்துழாயானை,
இகழ்வாய் கருதுவாய், என் நெஞ்சே—திகழ் நீர்க்
கடலும் மலையும் இரு விசும்பும் காற்றும்,
உடலும் உயிரும் ஏற்றான். [73]

Earlier in hymn (61) it was stated that God is both the material and the efficient cause of the world. In this hymn, Poygai Āḻvār conveys the idea that God is the indwelling Self (*antaryāmin*) of all things, sentient as well as insentient.

In the first two lines of the hymn, Poygai Āḻvār addresses the mind which plays an important role in shaping the life of a spiritual aspirant. It is the mind that discriminates between the good and the bad. It paves the way for release or bondage. The Āḻvār tells the mind that it can first listen to the greatness of the Lord who is not only the cause of the world, but also the indwelling Self of everything, and that it can decide thereafter the course of action which it has to pursue—whether to praise or condemn Him, or to speak well or ill of Him. The idea which is sought to be conveyed by the Āḻvār here is that if a person comes to know of God, however vague and incomplete his understanding may be, he will be gradually attracted towards God.

The *Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad* (III, vii, 1-23) explains in detail how Brahman is the indwelling Self (*antaryāmin*) of all beings, sentient and insentient. It says: "He who dwells in the earth, who is within the earth, whom the earth does not know, whose body the earth is, who controls the earth from within, He is your Self, the inner controller, the immortal." It gives a similar account with regard to other objects. Brahman dwells in earth and other elements, in the luminaries and in the *jīva*; also, it owns and controls them from within. So Brahman, the supreme Being, is not only the ground (*ādhāra*) of the entire universe, but also its inner controller (*niyantā*). Since Brahman is the inner Self of both *cit* and *acit*, it is characterized as the *śarīrin*, while the latter are said to be its *śarīra*, the cosmic body. Just as the *jīva* has a body which it supports and controls, even so Brahman has the entire universe comprising *cit* and *acit* as its cosmic body which it supports and controls. Just as the body is dependent on the *jīva*, even so the entire universe which is the cosmic body of God is dependent on Him.

Since all the objects of the world have come out of the five elements, *viz* ether, air, fire, water, and earth, the latter are said to be the cause of the former. Poygai Āḻvār mentions the ocean and the mountain, which are effects, in the third line of the hymn in a suggestive

way (*upalakṣaṇa*) to refer to all the things which are effects. In the same line, he refers to two elements, *viz* ether and air, which suggest the remaining three elements, *viz* fire, water, and earth. The body mentioned in the last line will also include the senses. And the soul which is also stated in the last line is *upalakṣaṇa* for *dharmabhūta-jñāna* and *nityavibhūti*, which are *ajaḍa*, according to Viśiṣṭādvaita. God owns, supports, and controls everything—*līlāvibhūti* as well as *nityavibhūti*.

XXXIX

The Shield of Śiva and Viṣṇu

"May Śiva and Viṣṇu protect us—Śiva who has the bull for His vehicle, who destroyed *Tripura*, who has smeared His body with ashes, who has His consort in one part of His body, who has long hairs, who has the *Gaṅgā* on His head; and Viṣṇu who has the kite for His vehicle, who tore the chest of Hiraṇya, whose colour is like that of a cool, blue gem, who has Śrī in His chest, who has a long crown and long feet." [1] [74]

This hymn, like hymn (5), gives a beautiful description of both Śiva and Viṣṇu. A spiritual aspirant may worship Śiva or Viṣṇu; or he may worship both of them. The earnest prayer of Poygai Āḻvār is that Śiva and Viṣṇu may protect their devotees.

XL

God Is the Way

"If we think of you, obstacles will disappear, and the binding evil deeds will loosen their hold and die.

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1. ஏற்றான் புள்ளூர்ந்தான் எயில் எரித்தான் மார்விடந்தான்
நீற்றான் நிழல் மணி வண்ணத்தான்—கூற்றொருபால்
மங்கையான் பூமகளான் வார்சடையான் நீண்முடியான்
கங்கையான் நீள் கழலான் காப்பு. [74]

Those who meditate on you are free from old age. Those who worship your feet, O the Lord of Śrī, will find the way (to you)."[1] [75]

Poygai Āḻvār says in this hymn that God shows the way to attain union with Him, which is calld *mokṣa*, by overcoming bondage.

The word "*kāppu*" which occurs at the beginning of the first line of the hymn means obstacle. If the word is understood in this sense, the meaning of the first line of the hymn is that a spiritual aspirant who thinks of God will be free from obstacles. The word "*kāppu*" may also be explained in the sense of protection. A person has to take care of, and protect, his things—his property, his family, his own health, etc. He is thus burdened with a heavy responsibility. But consider the position in the case of a devotee. Since a person who thinks of God and is devoted to Him is taken care of and is protected by God, he will be free from the responsibility of protecting his things. The supreme God alone is, indeed, the protector, and not the *jīva*. The action of a devotee must be based on this belief.

What binds a person is *karma*, which arises because of *kāma*, which again is caused by *avidyā*. The causal chain of bondage consisting of *avidyā*, *kāma*, and *karma* can be cut off by means of devotion (*bhakti*) to the Lord.

The word "*mūppu*" which occurs towards the end of the second line of the hymn means old age. Every object in the world is subject to six changes (*bhāva-vikāra*), *viz* birth, existence, change, growth, decline, and death. Old age which symbolizes decline stands for the sixfold *bhāva-vikāra*. When Poygai Āḻvār says that those who meditate on God will be free from old age, it is to suggest that the devotees of God overcome bondage, which involves the cycle of birth and death, and attain *mokṣa*.

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1. காப்பு உன்னே உன்னக் கழியும், அருவினைகள்
ஆப்பு உன்னே உன்ன அவிழ்ந்தொழியும்—மூப்பு உன்னைச்
சிந்திப்பார்க்கு இல்லே, திருமாலே, நின் அடியை
வந்திப்பார் காண்பார் வழி. [75]

God-realization or *mokṣa* is the goal. If so, the question to be answered is : who shows the way to the goal? Poygai Āḻvār answers this question by saying that God Himself shows the way to the goal. Since only through the grace of God the practice of *karma, jñāna,* and *bhakti* is possible, God Himself is the way as well as the goal.

XLI

God Is the Goal

"Those who worship you in the proper way will attain the form as stated in the eternally true *Veda*. The *Veṅkaṭa* mountain of the auspicious Lord who measured the universe will, without any doubt or fault, ensure the attainment of the supreme abode or status."[1] [76]

If God Himself is the way to the goal, what, then, is the nature of the goal to be attained? *Mokṣa*, which means release from bondage, is the goal to be attained. The nature of *mokṣa* can be explained in different ways. In this hymn Poygai Āḻvār says that release consists in the realization of one's nature.

It is stated in the *Bṛhadāraṇyaka* (VI, v, 6) that the object worthy of attainment through the threefold discipline of *śravaṇa, manana*, and *nididhyāsana* is Brahman or the supreme Self. Brahman, according to Advaita, is no other than the inward Self of the *jīva*. Owing to *avidyā*, the *jīva* thinks that it is different from Brahman, that it is a finite being possessing limited knowledge and happiness. But the *Upaniṣad* which the Āḻvār characterizes as eternal and infallible (*vaḻuvā-moḻi*), declares that the inward Self of the *jīva* is the supreme Brahman. There is, for example, the *Māṇḍūkya* text (2) which says : "All this is

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1. வழிநின்று நின்னைத் தொழுவார் வழுவா
மொழிநின்ற மூர்த்தியரே ஆவர்—பழுதொன்றும்
வாராத வண்ணமே விண்கொடுக்கும் மண்ணளந்த
சீரான் திருவேங்கடம். [76]

verily Brahman; and this Self is Brahman." There is also the celebrated *Chāndogya* declaration (VI, viii, 7), "That thou art," which is repeated several times. The *jīva*, suffering as it does because of *avidyā*, is not able to realize its true nature. When *avidyā* is removed through the right knowledge, the *jīva* realizes its essential nature, and remains in its true form as Brahman. That there takes places the manifestation of one's nature (*svarūpa-āvirbhāva*) at the dawn of the right knowledge and that remaining in one's own form as *sat*, *cit*, and *ānanda* is release, are stated in the *Chāndogya* text (VIII, xii, 2): "Attaining the supreme light, the *jīva* shines in its true form." For attaining release, *i.e.* for realizing one's true nature, one must pursue the discipline prescribed by Scripture.

The first two lines of the hymn, which refer to the attainment of release, may also be interpreted from the standpoint of Viśiṣṭādvaita. Release is *sāyujya*, attaining union with Brahman. The *jīva* is different from Brahman, though inseparably related to it. Though by its very nature it is endowed with infinite knowledge and unlimited bliss, it suffers in its empirical existence due to *avidyā* and *karma*. When it attains union with Brahman, *i.e. sāyujya*, which is release, it shines in its true form, regaining its infinite knowledge and bliss. The released soul intuits Brahman as its very Self. It has the experience to the effect: "What I am, that is He; and what He is, that I am." The *jīva* even in the state of liberation is, according to Viśiṣṭādvaita, entitatively different from Brahman, though there is experiential unity between them. Realizing its inseparable relation to Brahman, it overcomes the sense of exclusiveness and externality, and remains as non-different (*avibhāga*) from Brahman. The state of release is such that there is no *svarūpa aikya*, but only *viśiṣṭa aikya*, between the liberated soul and Brahman. The goal can be attained through the practice of *karma*, *jñāna*, and *bhakti* or by *prapatti*, according to Viśiṣṭādvaita.

Poygai Āḻvār brings out the greatness of the *Veṅkaṭa* hill in the last two lines of the hymn. Resort to a holy place like the *Veṅkaṭa* hill is one way of practising *bhakti*. The *Veṅkaṭa* hill itself, says the Āḻvār, can confer the highest good on the devotee.

XLII

The Donor and the Receiver

"You begged of Mahabali (three measures of) land; and as soon as the sparkling water (poured by him) filled your beautiful palm, did you not grow quickly (into the form of *Trivikrama*) and touch the gods remaining in the expansive *ākāśa* by your shoulders? Without despising the receiver, will any one speak ill of the donor?" [1] [79]

Reference is made in this hymn to God's incarnation as *Vāmana* and *Trivikrama*. It is with a view to help Indra that God incarnated as *Vāmana* and begged of Mahābali three measures of land. The entire universe of which God is the source and support belongs to Him. And so, God alone can be the donor. Forgetting this fact, Mahābali because of his ignorance and egoism claimed that he was the ruler of the world, and that the world belonged to him. He played the role of a donor and gave away anything which was asked by others. Incarnating as *Vāmana*, the Lord begged three measures of ground from Mahābali. Then, assuming the cosmic form of *Trivikrama*, He covered the entire universe in two measures; and when Mahabali offered his own head to be measured as the third one, the Lord placed His foot on his head and sent him down to the netherworld.

The Lord, the real donor, played the role of a receiver. Poygai Āḻvār observes that people who do not know the real position despise the Lord for his appearance first as the short-statured *Vāmana* and for his assumption, soon after getting the offer of gift from Mahābali, of the cosmic form of *Trivikrama*. The ignorant do not pay attention to the wrongs committed by Mahābali who claimed as his own what did not

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1. கொண்டானே அல்லால் கொடுத்தாரை யார் பழிப்பார்
மண் தா என இரந்து மாவலியை—ஒண் தாரை
நீர் அம் கை தோய நிமிர்ந்திலையே நீள் விசும்பில்
ஆர் அம் கை தோய அடுத்து. [79]

belong to him. On the contrary, they blame the Lord as if He has cheated Mahābali, who managed to conceal his wrongs under the cloak of charity.

XLIII

Poygai Āḻvār's Experience of God

"O the virtuous Lord who protected the people from the torrential rain of stones by holding aloft the mountain as an umbrella! Without going outside the threshold and also without getting into the interior of the house, you just now stationed yourself along with Śrī in the corridor (of the house) situated in the beautiful Tirukkovalūr liked by all. It is, indeed, marvellous."[1] [86]

This hymn contains the internal evidence for the experience of God which Poygai Āḻvār had along with Būtattāḻvār and Peyāḻvār when they took shelter in the narrow dark corridor of the house of a sage at Tirukkovalūr.

Poygai Āḻvār refers to the episode of Kṛṣṇa protecting the cow-herds and others against the torrential rain of stones by lifting up the *Govardhana* hill as an umbrella.

There is a difference between the experience which the cow-herds had when they witnessed the marvellous act of Kṛṣṇa lifting up the *Govardhana* hill and the experience which the first three Āḻvārs had when they witnessed the divine presence in their midst. The cow-herds were convinced that Kṛṣṇa who lifted the hill must be divine. They, however, saw only Kṛṣṇa. But the Āḻvārs were lucky enough to see Nārāyaṇa with Śrī. This is, indeed, a marvellous experience.

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1. நீயும் திருமகளும் நின்றுயால், குன்றெடுத்துப்
பாயும் பனிமறைத்த பண்பாளா—வாசல்
கடைகழியா, உள்புகா, காமர் பூங்கோவல்
இடைகழியே பற்றி இனி. [86]

XLIV

God-oriented Organs

"When I think of anything (through the mind), it will be your feet. When I sing daily in praise of anything, it will be your glory. If I adorn my head (with any ornament), it will be the beautiful feet of the Lord who has the lustrous discus. If so, it does not matter whatever happens to me."[1] [88]

Poygai Āḻvār feels happy that his mind, speech, and body are completely engrossed in the Lord.

XLV

Everything Reveals God

"The *pūvai* flower that blossoms even as it is seen and also the *kāyā* flower, both of which grow in a land suitable to them, through their colour reveal to me clearly the beautiful colour of the Lord. (When I am thus fortunate), is there anyone comparable to me? The supreme Lord who can be compared only with Himself cannot be compared with me."[2] [89]

A mystic that he is, Poygai Āḻvār sees the Lord whose colour is black whenever he sees flowers such as *kāyā* and *pūvai* which are also black in colour. The two black flowers mentioned here by the Āḻvār are by way of *upalakṣaṇa*. They stand for all black things. Whenever

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1. நாடிலும் நின்னடியே நாடுவன், நாள்தோறும்
பாடிலும் நின்புகழே பாடுவன்—சூடிலும்
பொன்னழி ஏந்திநின் பொன்னடியே சூடுவேற்கு
என்னகில் என்னே எனக்கு. [88]

2. எனக்கு ஆவார் ஆர் ஒருவரே, எம்பெருமான்
தனக்கு ஆவான் தானே மற்றல்லால்—புனக்காயாம்
பூமேனி, காணப் பொதியவிழும் பூவைப்பூ
மாமேனி காட்டும் வரம். [89]

is also required. The Āḻvār says that the tongue which is required for reciting the *mantra* is available. The tongue can do wonders, if only it is properly used. We do not have to search for it. It is there in the mouth, says the Āḻvār in a pointed way. It should be used for giving our thanks to the Lord and for uttering the sacred *aṣṭākṣara-mantra.*

The state of *mokṣa* is eternal. There is no return to the state of bondage from *mokṣa. Bhakti* and *prapatti* are the ways to *mokṣa* which is the highest goal to be attained. When the means necessary for the attainment of the goal is available, how is it possible for one, asks the Āḻvār, to go astray from the right path?

XLVIII

God Is the Controller

"O my mind! The red lotus-eyed Lord is the controller of merit and demerit. He is also the controller of this earth, the ocean full of waves, the air, and the *ākāśa* as also the *jīva* and other sentient beings different from these. Hold on to this idea unswervingly till the end."[1] [96]

In this hymn, Poygai Āḻvār conveys the idea that God is the controller of everything, including the *jīva.*

A text of the *Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad* (III, ii, 13) says: "A person becomes good by good work, and bad by bad work." The results of *karma*, good or bad, of a person determine his rebirth. God is the giver of fruits according to the merit and demerit of the *jīva.* He cannot be accused of partiality or cruelty on the ground that some are born poor, some others rich, that some are born as men and some

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1. திறம்பாது, என் நெஞ்சமே, செங்கண்மால் கண்டாய் அறம் பாவம் என்றிரண்டும் ஆவான்—புறந்தான், இம் மண்தான், மறிகடல்தான், மாருதந்தான், வான்தானே கண்டாய் கடைக்கண் பிடி. [96]

others as animals, because the rebirth of a person, the things which he experiences in that life, etc., are determined by the *karma* which he has done. God dispenses according to the merit and demerit of the *jīva*. It does not follow from this that God is not independent. Consider the case of rain which helps different seeds to sprout, each according to its nature, its potentiality. Or, consider the case of a king who rewards his servants according to their action. No one will accuse the rain and the king of partiality in respect of their work. It cannot also be said that the king is not independent just because he takes into consideration the action done by his subordinates when he has to reward them appropriately. While the *karma*, good or bad, of the *jīva* determines its future, God is the operative cause which brings the merit and the demerit of the *jīva* to fruition. This idea is also conveyed by another text of the *Bṛhadāraṇyaka* (IV, iv, 5): "As the *jīva* does and acts, so it becomes. By doing good, it becomes good, and by doing evil, it becomes evil—it becomes virtuous through good acts and vicious through evil acts."

Moreover, God is the controller of all the elements, from ether to earth, and the things constituted by these elements. He is also the controller of all sentient beings.

XLIX

Śiva and Viṣṇu in One Body

"Though Śiva with a body shining like gold, with matted hair, and auspicious qualities, and Viṣṇu who measured the universe appear in two different forms, one is ever in the body of the other."[1] [98]

Poygai Āḻvār lays emphasis in this hymn on the concept of Śaṅkara-Nārāyaṇa. Earlier in hymns (5) and (74) he has given

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1. பொன் திகழும் மேனிப் புரிசடை அம் புண்ணியனும்,
நின்று உலகம் தாய நெடுமாலும்—என்றும்
இருவர் அங்கத்தால் திரிவரேலும், ஒருவன்
ஒருவன் அங்கத்து என்றும் உளன். [98]

beautiful description of both Śiva and Viṣṇu. Though their appearances, functions, abodes, vehicles, weapons, etc., are different, they are the manifestations of one and the same ultimate reality. This idea is sought to be conveyed by the image of Śaṅkara-Nārāyaṇa, the forms of both Śiva and Viṣṇu appearing in the same image. Poygai Āḻvār says that for both Śiva and Viṣṇu the body is one. He restates the same idea differently by saying that one is in the body of the other.

L

God, the Indwelling Self

"O helpful mind! God exists. The good Lord exists always (to protect us). He remains in the minds of those who think of Him. Know that the Lord who is on the (milky) ocean and also on the *Veṅkaṭa* hill is in my mind."[1] [99]

God is not only transcendent, but also immanent. Poygai Āḻvār assures us in this hymn that though God is too far away, He is also too near, because He dwells in the minds of those who think of Him.

Does God exist or not? Poygai Āḻvār answers this question straightaway by declaring that God exists. Ordinarily no one doubts the existence of an empirical entity like a tree or a table. Empirical entities fall within the scope of our experience. We perceive them through one or more of our senses. We comprehend them through our mind. We denote them through words. But since Brahman or God is not an empirical entity, it cannot be comprehended by the mind and denoted by words. Hence the existence of God becomes

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1. உளன் கண்டாய், நல்நெஞ்சே, உத்தமன் என்றும்
உளன் கண்டாய், உள்ளுவார் உள்ளத்து—உளன் கண்டாய்
வெள்ளத்தின் உள்ளானும் வேங்கடத்து மேயானும்
உள்ளத்தின் உள்ளான் என்று ஓர். [99]

problematic. Though one may try to prove the existence of God through reasoning, the nature of God can be known only through Scripture. There are *śruti* texts like "Brahman is real, knowledge, and infinite" which convey the knowledge of Brahman. God who is known through Scripture may be realized through intuition or mystic experience.

It is stated in the *Taittirīya Upaniṣad* (II, vi, 1): "If anyone knows Brahman as non-existing, he himself becomes non-existent. If anyone knows that Brahman does exist, then they consider him as existing by virtue of that (knowledge)." This text may be interpreted in different ways. Brahman, the supreme Being, is no other than the inward Self of the individual. If it exists, the individual exists, and if it does not, the individual too does not exist. The *Taittirīya* text quoted above may be interpreted in another way also. God is the support and protector of the physical universe as well as the *jīva*. If Brahman or God is non-existent, the *jīva* too will be non-existent. There is yet another explanation. If a person thinks that Brahman or God is non-existent, he has no faith in the scheme of discipline comprising *jñāna*, *bhakti*, and *prapatti*. Such a person is called unrighteous (*asan*) in this world. If, on the contrary, a person knows that Brahman exists, then he pursues the path of *karma*, *jñāna*, etc. And the wise speak of him as *santam*, *i.e.* as one who treads the righteous path.

Poygai Āḻvār says that God who dwells on the milky ocean and who has also His abode on the sacred *Veṅkaṭa* hill is the indwelling spirit in the minds of those devotees who always meditate on Him. He echoes the teaching of the *Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad* (III, vii, 20) which says: "He who inhabits the mind and is within, whom the mind does not know, whose body is the mind, and who controls the mind from within, is the inner Ruler, your own immortal Self."

LI

Assurance and Attainment

"If you keep within you, O my mind, the Lord who measured the world in one step, who destroyed the

demon called Keśin, who wears the garland of cool, basil leaves, and who has performed marvellous deeds, then you can see the two feet of the Lord — one foot (through which the Lord measured the world) and the other foot, beautiful and red-coloured like a flower, by which he kicked the cart (*i.e.* the demon who in the form of a spirit animated a cart."[1] [100]

Poygai Āḻvār offered the garland of hymns at the feet of the Lord and worshipped Him for the purpose of overcoming bondage. This is what is stated in the first hymn. His worship of God was fruitful. Through the grace of God, who is the way as well as the goal, he attained *mokṣa* or God-realization. In several hymns he speaks of his experience of God. On the basis of his own authentic experience he now tells for the benefit of others in the concluding hymn that anyone who worships God and meditates on Him in the proper way will attain *mokṣa*.

The first two lines of the hymn explain the nature of the *puruṣārtha* to be attained, and the last two lines set forth the means thereto.

Poygai Āḻvār speaks of the Lord as "*tāyavan*", "*keśavan*", and "*māyavan*". God is "*oraḍiyil tāyavan*", one who measured the world by one foot. The expression "*oraḍiyil*" is significant. Though it may be construed in the sense of "*oraḍiyāl*" (*i.e.* by one foot), it may also be taken as it is. The word "*tāyam*" means ownership. So, the expression "*oraḍiyil tāyavan*" means one who claims the ownership of the world which has taken refuge in one foot. Another explanation may also be given for the word "*tāyavan*". The Lord reveals Himself as mother (*tāy*) by His quality of accessibility (*saulabhya*). Just as a mother would embrace her children ignoring their faults, even so the Lord by encompassing the world by one foot, played the role of a mother through

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1. ஓரடியும் சாடு உதைத்த ஒண்மலர்ச் சேவடியும்
ஈரடியும் காணலாம், என் நெஞ்சே—ஓரடியில்
தாயவனை, கேசவனை, தண் துழாய் மாலை சேர்
மாயவனையே மனத்து வை. [100]

His deeds of love and redemption. Keśava is an epithet of Kṛṣṇa. Keśin, a demon who assumed the form of a horse and troubled the cow-herds, was killed by Kṛṣṇa. The two words "*tāyavan*" and "*keśavan*" convey the idea that God plays the dual role of protecting the good and punishing the wicked. The term "*māyavan*" means one who has the power of *māyā*. The *Śvetāśvatara Upaniṣad* (IV, 10) speaks of the great Lord as *māyin*. It says: "Know then that *prakṛti* is *māyā*, and the wielder of *māyā* is the great Lord." Moreover, the Lord who controls the *līlāvibhūti* and who has manifested Himself through many incarnations is a great wonder, beyond our understanding.

Reference is made in the first line to *Kṛṣṇāvatāra*. A demon who was commissioned by Kaṁsa to kill Kṛṣṇa assumed the form of a spirit and animated a cart for the purpose of crushing the infant Kṛṣṇa sleeping in a cradle. When Kṛṣṇa kicked the cart with one foot as if in sport, the cart broke into pieces, and the demon was killed. Poygai Āḻvār says that one who constantly meditates on the Lord, who is endowed with the qualities of *saulabhya* (easy accessibility), *sauśīlya* (goodness), and *vātsalya* (affection), will attain His feet, *i.e.* will attain *mokṣa*.